DAYS OF FESTIVAL

Wishing our readers a happy Ugadi and Eid

On the occasion of Ugadi on 30 March and Eid-ul-Fitr on 31 March, our offices will stay closed.
Hence, there will be no editions of Salar Digital English Daily dated 31 March and 1 April.

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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SEHRI
5.04AM
IFTAR
6.33 PM

Death toll crosses 1,644 in Myanmar, 3,408 injured

A collapsed building in Naypyitaw, Myanmar; Rescue work at a collapsed under construction high rise in Bangkok, Thailand *PHOTO: PTI*

BANGKOK, 29 MARCH

The death toll from a powerful 7.7 magnitude earthquake in Myanmar soared to 1,644 on Saturday as more bodies were pulled from the rubble of the scores of buildings that collapsed when it struck near the country's second-largest city.

The country's government said another 3,408 injured, with 139 missing as on Saturday night. The statement suggested the numbers could still rise, saying "detailed figures are still being collected."

But even though teams and equipment have been flown in from other nations, they are hindered by the airports in being damaged and unfit to land planes in the country already torn by civil war.

In neighbouring Thailand, the quake rocked the greater Bangkok area, home to some 17 million people, and other parts of the country. Bangkok city authorities said so far six people have been found dead, 26 injured and 47 are still missing, most from a construction site near the capital's popular Chatuchak market. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4,6

INDIA SENDS RELIEF MATERIALS, 80 NDRF PERSONNEL TO MYANMAR

India on Saturday delivered 15 tonnes of relief materials to Myanmar under Operation Brahma and a contingent of 80 National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) for relief and rescue work. The supplies included tents, sleeping bags, blankets, ready-to-eat meals, water purifiers, solar lamps, generator sets and essential medicines, officials said.

Two more IAF aircraft are being loaded with relief material for Myanmar and the planes will depart from Hindon Air Force Station soon.

Trump calls Modi a 'very smart man'

WASHINGTON/NEW YORK/NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

As US and India concluded a four-day negotiation, US President Donald Trump described Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a "very smart man" and his "great friend". He expressed optimism over that tariff talks between the US and India and said the negations would "work out very well".

"India is one of the highest tariffing nations in the world.... it's brutal, it's brutal. They're very smart. He (Modi) is a very smart man and a great friend of mine. We had very good talks. I think it's going to work out very well between India and our country," Trump said.

"And I want to say you have a great prime minister," he said.

Meanwhile, India and US decided to hold sectoral talks under the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA) in the coming weeks. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

PHOTO: ANI

BBMP presents Rs 19,927cr budget amid challenges

It plans to collect waste management fee with property tax

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) unveiled its budget for 2024-25, with an outlay of Rs 19,927 crore, marking the fifth consecutive year in the absence of elected representatives.

It prioritises decongesting traffic through infrastructure projects, including tunnel roads, elevated corridors, and white-topping. The 'Pedestrian First' initiative will revamp 1,000 km of footpaths. The 22.7 km Outer Ring Road between Central Silk Board and KR Puram, a key IT corridor, will be upgraded at Rs 400 crore.

The budget, approved by BBMP Administrator Umashankar, was tabled at the civic body headquarters by Special Commissioner (Finance) Harish Kumar, in the presence of Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath. It includes an underpass at Ramohalli Gate, a railway overbridge on Kengeri Main Road, and road widening in RT Nagar, Lingarajapuram, Pulakeshinagar, Yeshwanthpur. Wards get Rs 22.5 cr each. ***>More on page 2***

BBMP BUDGET ALLOCATIONS

Special Commissioner of Finance Harish Kumar K, Administrator SR Umashankar and BBMP Chief Commissioner, Tushar Giri Nath arrive to present BBMP Budget Estimates for the year 2025-26, at Town Hall in Bengaluru on Saturday. *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

₹ 4,900 cr property tax collected by BBMP in 2024-25 — highest in India for the second consecutive year.

E-khata system Digitising 25 lakh manual khatas, making it the largest e-khata system.

₹ 42,200 cr Tunnel Projects (Hebbal-Silk Board) & (KR Puram)

Rs 13,200 cr Elevated corridors

Rs 9,000 cr Double deckers

Rs 6,000 cr White topping

Rs 3,000 cr Construction of rajakaluves

Rs 1,400 cr Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited

Rs 400 cr Sky Deck

Rs 210 cr Development and maintenance of lakes

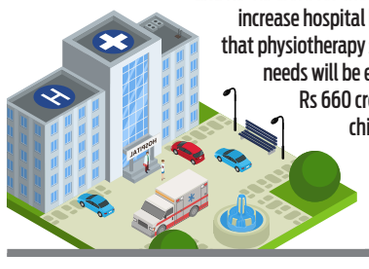
Rs 50 cr Installing decorative lights

BBMP-ONE-APP

Rs 40 cr to streamline all citizen services apps under one platform such as Fix-Pot Hole-APP, Sahaaya-Public Grievances-APP, E-Khatha-APP, Advertisement-APP, Property-GPS-App.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND CIVIC AMENITIES

BBMP has allocated Rs 633 crore for a new medical college at MC Layout Hospital and Rs 413 crore for the 'Healthy Bengaluru' initiative to increase hospital bed capacity. Kumar highlighted that physiotherapy services for children with special needs will be expanded to seven more centres. Rs 660 crore has been set aside for micro-chipping stray dogs and expanding Animal Birth Control (ABC) programme. Rs 10 crore has been allocated for abattoirs.



SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT FOCUS

With Rs 1,400 cr, BBMP will set up 4 waste processing zones, each 50 to 100 acres. The government has been approached for land acquisition, with Rs 100 crore reserved for this. Bio-mining and remediation continue at Mandur and Bellahalli to clear waste. New waste transfer centres with a daily capacity of 150-200 tonnes will be set up in 27 divisions, with 22 dry waste collection centres. Waste-to-energy initiatives include a plant in Bidarahalli generating 11.5 MW of electricity daily. BBMP also plans to upgrade 160 public toilets and build 204 new ones. 12,692 pourakarmikas will be recruited. —Salar News

VEHICLE TORCHED IN HENNUR

BBMP truck hits 2 wheeler, kills boy

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

A BBMP garbage truck ran over a 10-year-old boy in Hennur on Saturday afternoon, triggering public outrage as enraged residents set the vehicle on fire.

The tragic accident occurred around 12.30pm near the railway bridge on Thanisandra Main Road. According to police, the victim, identified as Iman, was on his way to school with his father on a two-wheeler when the speeding truck rammed into them.

As soon as the truck struck the two-wheeler, the boy fell from the vehicle and was allegedly run over by the BBMP truck, a police officer said.

Family sources said Iman was accompanying his father to school to confirm holiday details with his teacher when tragedy struck.

A medical examination of the driver revealed that he was not under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident, the police officer added.

As news of the child's death spread, furious locals set the truck ablaze as the truck driver fled the spot. Fire and emergency services rushed to the spot and managed to douse the flames, but nearly 40 per cent of the vehicle was gutted.

—Salar News

18 Naxals killed in Chhattisgarh, 2 jawans hurt

SUKMA, 29 MARCH

> **Weapons and violence cannot bring change; only peace and development can**
>
> —Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

Security forces gunned down 18 Naxalites, including 11 women and a Maoist carrying a Rs 25 lakh reward, during an anti-insurgency operation in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Saturday, officials said.

The gunfight broke out at around 8.00am in the forest when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General (IG) of Police, Bastar Range Sundarraj P told PTI.

The IG said personnel from the DRG and the Central Reserve Police Force were involved in the operation launched on Friday night.

He said two DRG personnel sustained minor injuries in the face-off, and their condition was stated to be normal. .

Sundarraj said a large cache of firearms, including an AK-47 rifle, self-loading rifle (SLR), INSAS rifle, .303 rifle, a rocket launcher and barrel grenade launcher (BGL), and explosive materials were recovered from the spot.

About 10 days ago, security forces killed at least 30 Naxalities in two separate encounters in the state. *—PTI*

CELEBRATORY SPIRIT

Flower vendors tie flowers to make garlands on the eve of Ugadi festival at KR Market; Women applying Mehendi ahead of Eid Ul Fitr at Frazer Town in Bengaluru on Saturday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

KARNATAKA GOVT APPROVES 69 PROJECTS WORTH OVER RS 3,500 CRORE

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Karnataka government approved 69 projects with a total investment of Rs 3500.86 crore during the 152nd meeting of the state-level monitoring committee on Saturday.

These projects approved under the leadership of Minister for Large, Medium Industries, and Infrastructure Development MB Patil are expected to create employment opportunities for approximately 24,954 people across the state, a statement from the minister's office said.

Among the notable approvals are Jyoti CNC Automation Limited, which plans to invest Rs 285 crore on machine tool centre, Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Ltd plans to invest Rs 250 crore in manufacturing of soaps and detergents and Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Limited plans to invest Rs 249 crore.

12 projects with capital investments exceeding Rs 50 crore, totaling Rs 2311.88 crore are set to generate employment for approximately 18,972 people and 55 projects with investments between Rs 15 crore and Rs 50 crore, amounting to Rs 1148.98 crore, are expected to employ 5,832 people. *—PTI*

7 MINUTE DELIVERY

Bengaluru gets 'drone deliveries' to combat traffic woes

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

The IT hub finally gets commercial drone delivery service, to bypass maddening Bengaluru traffic.

"The service is already available in Konankunte and Kanakapura Road areas," said Ankit Kumar, founder and chief executive officer, Skye Air, a Delhi-based hyperlocal drone delivery network.

Residents can get things delivered to them in a span of seven minutes, he added.

As it happens, despite the buzz in Bengaluru about unmanned air taxis and drones for the last couple of years, the Millennium City, Gurugram, beat the IT hub in launching the ultra-fast drone delivery service first.

The first commercial drone delivery happened in Gurugram Sector 92, covering 7.5 km in just 3-4 mins instead of a usual road route of 15 minutes.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

"We have achieved 1 million deliveries in Gurugram in the last one year. This enabled us to extend the service to Bengaluru," Kumar said.

According to him, they have obtained air space approval in the category of drones and can fly up to 120m above sea level in the approved corridors.

Upon reaching its destination, the drone lowers to 20 metres and activates the Skye Winch system, carefully lowering the package to the designated Skye Pod or drop zone, auto-releases the package and returns to its origin using the same route, Kumar said. The drone is called Skye Ship One, which is designed for high-capacity operations and can carry up to 10 kg per trip.

"And if things go as planned in Bengaluru, we will be soon expanding to Bannerghatta Road," he said.

Skye Air's customers include Bluedart, DTDC, Shiprocket and Ecom Express. *—PTI*

- Skye Air's service is already available in Konankunte and other Kanakapura Road areas. Depending on the response, it could soon expand to Bannerghatta Road

PHOTO: PIXABAY

3 men drown in lake while bathing cows in Nanjangud

MYSURU, 29 MARCH

Three men drowned in a lake when they went to bathe their cattle at Kamahalli in Nanjangud taluk here on Saturday. Police said the deceased are Vinod, 17; Basavegowda, 45, and Muddegowda, 48. They were related and natives of the same village. They had gone to the lake to bathe their cows ahead of Ugadi. Vinod got stuck in a slush and drowned along with his cow. The other two drowned while trying to save Vinod. Biligere Police retrieved their bodies and handed them to the families after post mortem .*—Salar News*

Engineer's mom donates his organs to save 6 lives

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

A heartbroken mother, Rekha Rao, has chosen to donate the organs of her son, Rakesh Kumar, who died in a motorcycle accident on 15 March. The 33-year-old was critically injured when his two-wheeler skidded, resulting in severe head and facial trauma. Despite efforts to save him at Apollo Hospital, he was declared brain dead. In her grief, Rao found solace in knowing Rakesh's organs could save others; his liver, kidneys, corneas, heart valves, and skin have already provided life-saving treatments to several patients. "Each donation will make a profound difference," said Dr B Ravi Mohan Rao, highlighting the critical need for organ transplants in Bengaluru, where over 4,000 patients await help. Rakesh worked as an engineer in next-generation healthcare. *—PTI*

MSIL to launch E-commerce platform soon

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

The Karnataka government enterprise Mysore Sales International Ltd (MSIL) is poised to launch its e-commerce platform, facilitating the sale of various products. This aims to create a marketplace for both government and private producers, similar to the central government's Government e-Marketplace portal. Large and Medium Industries Minister MB Patil held a meeting with senior officials to discuss details. The platform will be developed in four phases. Initially, only MSIL products will be available. The second phase will expand to include products from government enterprises, MSMEs, and women's self-help groups. The third phase will introduce consumer and electronic products, while the final phase will include fresh and perishable goods.*—PTI*

BWSSB wins World Water 2025 Award

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) is to receive the esteemed World Water 2025 Award at a ceremony in New Delhi on 31 March. This accolade recognises BWSSB's outstanding contributions to sustainable urban water management. According to Ram Prasath Manohar, Chairman of BWSSB, the award acknowledges the board's efforts to replenish 23 lakes with treated water, thereby boosting groundwater levels. Additionally, BWSSB established a groundwater task force in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Science and constructed 3,000 rainwater harvesting tanks. Manohar said it will motivate BWSSB to strive for a water-secure future. The Water Digest Awards, presented in conjunction with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), honour exceptional achievements in water treatment, reuse, and conservation.*—PTI*

'Brand' overshadows City's basic needs

BBMP Budget aimed at revamping B'luru may do little to address flooding & poor roads

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

The BBMP budget for 2025-26, worth Rs 19,927 crore, aimed at rebranding and giving the city a makeover may do little to address teething issues like flooding and traffic management, say citizens. Benglureans wary of grand plans, say it may be an exercise in vain if basic infrastructure—such as pothole repairs, illegal building demolitions, and storm water drain issues remain neglected.

Prof Ashish Verma, Convenor of IISc Sustainable Transportation Lab, criticised the BBMP budget for misaligned priorities, stating, "The proposed projects, like tunnels and double-decker roads, will harm Bengaluru's quality of life and sustainability. Despite contributing to the Brand Bengaluru report, none of its recommendations were included."

Raj Bhagat, a water conservation expert, acknowledged the Rs 2,000 crore allocation to enhance Bengaluru's Climate Resilience in the BBMP budget, but said there was no clarity about project details and how the money would be spent. He said, "Its unclear how much will go towards crucial projects like stormwater drain construction and enhancement."

BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Giri Nath, Administrator SR Umashankar and Special Commissioner of Finance Harish Kumar K at Town Hall in Bengaluru on Saturday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Raghavendra Poojari H S, Program Lead at B.PAC, said, "The 2025-26 BBMP Budget shows ambitious allocations but highlights persistent underutilisation of funds. BBMP expected Rs 800 crore from a new advertisement policy but raised nothing. It aims for Rs 1000 crore next year with better collection mechanisms.

"Under Brand Bengaluru, there's been significant underutilisation. For example, Rs. 50 crores allocated for education last year wasn't used, and only Rs. 1 crore of Rs. 275 crores for Healthy Bengaluru was spent. Despite a large Rs. 2960 crores allocation this year, only Rs. 385 crores was used in 2024-25. Dhananjaya Padmanabhachar, Convenor of Karnataka Home Buyers Forum, called for better footpaths and protection of land rights of owners.

Health, education, lake maintenance, and public amenities need better prioritisation. For instance, only Rs. 27 crores of Rs. 49 crores allocated for lakes was used. Some projects have been delayed or scaled down, suggesting the original budget was overly optimistic or based on incorrect assumptions."

Sandeep Anirudhan, Convenor of Citizens' Agenda for Bengaluru, opined that funds were being wasted on vanity projects like the Skydeck and tunnels, while essential infrastructure was being neglected. *—Salar News*

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

Rs 1,277 cr Arrears collected from around 3 lakh properties.

Rs 880 cr to reduce traffic congestion

Rs 500 cr Salaries and allowances of pourakarmikas.

Rs 10 lakh each to 1,077 retired pourakarmikas who have served minimum of 5 years in BBMP.

Rs 247.25 cr allocated to provide permanent relief to flood-affected areas.

Rs 183.69 cr for quality education to children studying in BBMP schools and colleges.

Rs 118 cr for maintaining 1,280 parks under BBMP.

AI Artificial intelligence extensively in all the services of the BBMP such as identifying illegal properties and delivering documents.

Rs 100 cr for development of Kempegowda Magadi Fort.

Rs 60 cr for street dogs.

Rs 10 cr kept aside for development of street vendors.

Rs 5 cr for development of night shelters for the homeless.

Rs 2 crore Reserved for senior citizens' daily needs.

PHOTO: thesoftcopy.in

'Proper toilets, bus stops must for women's safety'

BENGALUR, 29 MARCH

- The reports are based on an in-depth assessment of 265 public places across six key categories frequently accessed by women in the City

The Bangalore Political Action Committee (B.PAC) has published its B.SAFE Constituency Public Place Safety Audit Reports for Vijayanagar and Govindarajanagar Assembly Constituencies. The reports are based on an in-depth assessment of 265 public places across six key categories frequently accessed by women.

According to TK Siri, Programme Lead at B.PAC, this is the third phase of the B.SAFE Constituency initiative, which aims to create safer public spaces for women through a comprehensive approach. The initiative includes safety audits, community awareness programmes, action plans, and sustained advocacy.

The audit, conducted by students from RNS College of Architecture in Bangalore, covered 46 Anganwadi Kendras, 131 bus stops, 58 parks, 10 Primary Health Centres (PHCs), four police stations, and 16 public toilets across both constituencies.

Key findings from the audit include inadequate lighting at bus stops, inaccessible toilets, and insufficient security measures in parks. For instance, in Vijayanagar constituency, 41 out of 52 bus stops required better lighting, while five out of 11 toilets audited were not kept open throughout the day.

The reports were released in the presence of Priya Krishna, MLA of Govindarajanagar, and Srividya Natraj, Vice President from CGI. The B. SAFE Constituency initiative has audited Mahadevapura and Malleswaram in 2020, and Hebbal and Dasarahalli in 2022. *—PTI*

CM seeks national recognition for Rani Chennamma's samadhi

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has addressed Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to designate the samadhi of Kittur Rani Chennamma as a "monument of national importance" under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 1958. Rani Chennamma, the queen of the former princely state of Kittur, is celebrated for her valiant resistance against the British East India Company in 1824.

In a letter to Modi, Siddaramaiah highlighted the samadhi's historical and cultural significance, asserting that Rani Chennamma is a pivotal figure in India's independence narrative, inspiring generations with her courage. He described the site, located in Bailahongala taluk of Belagavi district, as not merely a resting place but a "sacred site" embodying the enduring spirit of India's struggle for freedom.

"Recognising this site as a 'nationally important monument' would be crucial in preserving her legacy and honouring her contributions," Siddaramaiah stated. He brought to the Prime Minister's attention that, despite its importance, the samadhi requires proper conservation and development to protect it from degradation.

Additionally, the Chief Minister noted that such recognition would enhance visibility and attract visitors, promoting cultural tourism and contributing to the socio-economic growth of the region. He emphasised the role of national recognition in reinforcing Karnataka's pride and securing its rightful place in Indian history.

Siddaramaiah urged Modi to instruct the Ministry of Culture and the Archaeological Survey of India to expedite the evaluation process for declaring the samadhi a monument of national importance, thereby ensuring the future preservation and appreciation of Rani Chennamma's remarkable legacy. *—PTI*

The Chief Minister urged the Union government to expedite the process through the Ministry of Culture and ASI *PHOTO: ALLABOUTBELGAUM*

Udupi student's kidnapping case prompts legal action

UDUPI, 29 MARCH

A case has been filed against a youth, Akram Mohammed, accused of kidnapping a 20-year-old engineering student, based on a complaint from her father, Godwin Devdas.

The incident reportedly occurred on 20 March when the student alighted from her college bus at Kukkikatte Junction. Devdas claims that while walking towards her aunt's house, his daughter was abducted by Mohammed on his motorbike.

A bus driver who witnessed the incident alerted Devdas, who asserts that this incident is revenge for a previous complaint he made against Mohammed for harassment when his daughter was a minor. Devdas has further alleged that his daughter is a victim of 'love jihad', claiming that Mohammed had been contacting her for five years via Instagram and had threatened to release intimate photos.

The local police registered the case under Section 140(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNS) after Devdas expressed dissatisfaction with their inaction regarding his earlier complaint. He has since filed a habeas corpus petition with the High Court, seeking his daughter's production in court, with the hearing adjourned to 4 April.

Meanwhile, Mohammed has applied for registration of their marriage under the Special Marriage Act and requested anticipatory bail, with a court hearing scheduled for 2 April. *—PTI*

Will raise my voice against BSY: Yatnal after expulsion

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Expelled BJP MLA Basangouda Patil Yatnal in a statement to ANI, voiced his concerns about the influence of the Yediyurappa family within the party, questioning their positions and asserting that their actions contradicted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's stance against nepotism and corruption.

"I will raise my voice against BS Yediyurappa and his son, who made the party a family affair," he said. Yatnal added that he would not seek re-admittance to the BJP, claiming he had committed no wrongdoing and that the leadership should be the ones to apologise. He maintains that a significant portion of MLAs support his cause to eliminate dynasty politics. He emphasised his loyalty to the party's core values, stating that if the BJP reaches out to him with respect, he would reconsider his position.

He was expelled from BJP for six years, following a series of violations of party discipline. This decision, made by the party's Central Disciplinary Committee, comes after Yatnal openly criticised the party leadership, particularly targeting former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa and his family for allegedly promoting dynasty politics. *—PTI*

THEATRE MAGIC

India's largest LED immersive screen is here

Called Mission Interstellar, the theatre offers next-generation flying space voyage experience. It is housed within an eight-storey dome-shaped structure with a 23-meter-high roof *PHOTO: X*

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

The largest LED-based immersive screen theatre in India, named Mission Interstellar, was inaugurated this Saturday at Wonderla Bengaluru, a prominent amusement park. This cutting-edge attraction offers an exhilarating flying space voyage experience within a striking eight-storey dome structure boasting a 23-metre-high roof.

Arun K Chittilappilly, Executive Chairman and Managing Director of Wonderla Holidays Ltd, remarked, "With Mission Interstellar, we are ushering in a new era of immersive entertainment that seamlessly blends cutting-edge technology with excitement." The launch also marks Wonderla's 25th anniversary in the industry.

Featuring a 22m x 15m curved LED screen, Mission Interstellar aims to provide unmatched visual clarity. Guests will experience the thrill of flight utilising a hydraulic lift seating system imported from Italy, which elevates riders 40 feet into the air. This innovative system synchronises movements with high-tech laser projections and environmental effects, creating a fully immersive experience. The theatre was officially launched by Kannada actor Ashika Ranganath. *—PTI*

Bengaluru Metro achieves Platinum Green Rating

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

The Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has been awarded the esteemed Platinum Rating by the Indian Green Building Council for five stations on the Reach-4B Green Line.

The stations—Konanakunte Cross, Doddakallasandra, Vajarahalli, Talaghattapura, and Silk Institute—were recognised for their sustainable design in the MRTS Elevated Stations category.

The IGBC commended BMRCL for its implementation of energy-efficient lighting, HVAC systems, solar energy solutions, rainwater harvesting, and water recycling at these stations. Additionally, eco-friendly construction materials were utilised to minimise environmental impact. This accolade underscores Bengaluru's commitment to sustainable urban infrastructure.

M Maheshwar Rao, Managing Director of BMRCL, said, "This award reflects our dedication to sustainability, ensuring energy efficiency and water conservation in our stations." The corporation intends to extend these practices across all metro corridors, establishing a benchmark for sustainable urban transport in India. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: ANI

M'rashtra DyCMs conflicted on farmer loans

PUNE, 29 MARCH

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said the government's commitment to fulfilling all election manifesto promises, following a controversial statement from his counterpart and Finance Minister Ajit Pawar who said election promises don't translate into actions and advised farmers to repay crop loans. Shinde affirmed that the monthly aid under the Ladki Bahin Yojana would rise from Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,100 once the state's financial conditions improve. Conversely, Pawar stressed the necessity of repaying loans, citing Maharashtra's budget challenges, including its mammoth task of waving electricity bills. *—PTI*

50 held for clashes in WB's Mothabari; normalcy restored

MALDA, 29 MARCH

The situation in Mothabari, a locality in West Bengal's Malda district, is gradually returning to normal following violent clashes that erupted on Thursday. Local police have reported that 16 additional arrests were made, bringing the total to 50 individuals detained in connection with the unrest. Inspector General (North Bengal), Rajesh Yadav, confirmed that calm is being restored as shops and establishments have started to reopen. Tensions escalated after a religious procession passed near a place of worship, leading to incidents of arson, vandalism, and physical assaults. To maintain order, the police have deployed four companies of state armed police along with additional personnel from the Rapid Action Force. Internet services in Mothabari and surrounding areas remain suspended as a precaution. Despite the clashes, prohibitory measures have not been implemented due to the approaching festivities of Ram Navami and Eid. The Calcutta High Court has mandated local authorities to submit an action report by 3 April. *—PTI*

Protest erupts in Jaipur over temple vandalism

JAIPUR, 29 MARCH

A protest broke out in Jaipur on Saturday after locals discovered vandalism at the Tejaji temple on Tonk Road. The protestors, including members of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal, along with Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP) workers blocked the busy road, demanding the arrest of those responsible. Police attempted to disperse the crowd, using mild force and detaining some protesters. The road was eventually reopened, but tensions remained high. VHP spokesperson Amitosh Pareek condemned the vandalism, stating it was an insult to Tejaji Maharaj and demanding the identification and arrest of those involved. *—PTI*

Navratri: Sena's Nirupam calls for ban on Shawarma

MUMBAI, 29 MARCH

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Nirupam has urged Mumbai Police to close street-side shawarma stalls and other non-veg food vendors during the Navratri festival, saying it is offensive to Hindu sentiments. Nirupam stated, "With the holy festival of Navratri commencing tomorrow, many Hindu devotees will fast and worship the goddess. The presence of open shawarma stalls selling non-vegetarian food in Mumbai is disrespectful to these sentiments." He highlighted that over 250 shawarma stalls are located in Andheri East alone. "Selling non-veg food in a closed restaurant is acceptable, but selling it on the streets during Navratri is disrespectful," he said. *—PTI*

Trump says 'smart' Modi will make tariffs 'work out well'

India, US conclude four-day negotiations, schedule sectoral talks

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON/ NEW DELHI 29 MARCH

US President Donald Trump has described Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a "very smart man" and his "great friend" while emphasising that tariff talks between the US and India would "work out very well".

"Prime Minister Modi was here just recently and we have always been very good friends," the US president said in the White House on Friday.

The remarks came days before Trump's reciprocal tariffs on the United States' trade partners kick in on 2 April.

"India is one of the highest tariffing nations in the world.... it's brutal, it's brutal. They're very smart. He (Modi) is a very smart man and a great friend of mine. We had very good talks. I think it's going to work out very well between India and our country," Trump said.

"And I want to say you have a great prime minister," he said.

The remarks assume significance as they came the same day Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri spoke with US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau to discuss bilateral trade, including the reduction of barriers to achieve a balanced trade relationship.

US President Donald Trump called Prime Minister Narendra Modi a 'very smart man', and 'a great friend' *PHOTO: PTI*

During their conversation, Misri and Landau "touched on the growing bilateral trade, defence and technology cooperation, and issues relating to mobility and migration", the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, India and the US have decided to hold sectoral talks under the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA) in the coming weeks. The decision was made after the four-day negotiations of senior officers from India and the US concluded on Saturday.

- India and US are aiming to conclude the first phase of the fresh sectoral by fall. The are seeking to double bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030 as part of the recent deals

During these discussions, the two sides held a productive exchange of views on deepening bilateral cooperation in priority areas, including increasing market access, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers and deepening supply chain integration in a mutually beneficial manner.

India and the US are aiming to conclude the first phase of the agreement by the fall of 2025 (September-October). They have also set a target to more than double bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030 from the current over USD 190 billion. *—PTI*

UCC A KEY AGENDA

BJP will be in power at Centre for at least 30 yrs: Shah

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah exuded confidence the BJP will remain in power at the Centre for another 20 years.

"When I was the national president of the BJP, I had said the BJP will remain in power for the next 30 years. Only 10 years have gone now," he said at the Times Now Summit 2025 Friday night.

Asked about the Uniform Civil Code, the home minister said all BJP-ruled states will introduce the UCC one-by-one as it is one of the key agendas of the BJP since was formed.

"One-by-one, all the BJP-ruled state governments will introduce it. Gujarat has already set up a committee for it," he said.

"It was the decision of the Constituent Assembly (to introduce UCC). The Congress might have forgotten it but we have not. We said we would abrogate Article 370. We have done that. We said we would construct a Ram temple at Ayodhya. We have done that too. Now UCC remains," he added.

Shah added that he inherited three problems as the Union Home Minister: Naxal violence, terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and insurgency in the Northeast. *—PTI*

When the Budget discussion was going on in Parliament, Rahul Gandhi was in Vietnam.

We have given the assurance that Jammu and Kashmir statehood will be restored. But we can't disclose when.

We imposed Presidents Rule when the time was appropriate.

Had there been an Emergency, they (Congress leaders) would be in jail.

-Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

Kunal Kamra faces 3 fresh cases in Mumbai

MUMBAI, 29 MARCH

Stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra is facing multiple legal challenges after three complaints were filed against him at Khar police station for allegedly making controversial remarks about Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Among the complainants are the Mayor of Jalgaon and two businessmen from Nashik.

Despite being summoned for questioning, Kamra has yet to appear before the police.

The Madras High Court recently granted him interim anticipatory bail until 7 April, as he faces growing threats amid the uproar caused by his satirical comments.

Kamra has been vocal against conventional media, labelling it as a "mouthpiece for the ruling party" and criticising its role in spreading misinformation. His remarks, which included a joke calling Shinde a "traitor," have provoked backlash from political leaders, prompting vandalism at the venue where he performed.

Kunal Kamra *PHOTO: ANI*

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut has demanded central protection for Kamra, drawing parallels to the protection offered to actress Kangana Ranaut in 2020.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Nirupam alleges that Kamra has received significant foreign funding, claiming it amounts to Rs 4 crore from "anti-India" organisations, warning of potential sedition charges against him. *—PTI*

DMK protests over MNREGA payments

CHENNAI, 29 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin led massive protests across the state, calling for the release of over Rs 4,000 crore owed to Tamil Nadu under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA). Demonstrations organised by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) were held at 1,170 locations, engaging union members and rural employment participants.

DMK MP TR Balu spearheaded a rally on the outskirts of Chennai, emphasising the programme's historical significance as an initiative of the late DMK leader M. Karunanidhi, guaranteeing 100 days of employment. Balu protested against the significant reduction in MNREGA funds from the previous year and accused the Union Government of attempting to undermine the scheme.

DMK protested against the Centre for the release of over 4,000 crore in funds for Tamil Nadu *PHOTO: ANI*

Stalin condemned the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for its alleged indifference towards MNREGA workers, questioning why funds are available for corporate tax waivers but not for impoverished workers relying on their earnings. He characterised the BJP's approach as "ruthless" and "sadistic", urging the central government to address the growing discontent among rural workers. Women played a prominent role in the protests, holding placards demanding their wages and highlighting the need for prompt action from the government. *—PTI*

PRESS FOR FREEDOM

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee during a protest against the arrest of journalist Dilwar Hussain Mojumder, in Guwahati. The scribe was arrested for questioning a bank head over his links to Assam CM *PHOTO: PTI*

Cong flays Modi govt over ATM withdrawal charges

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The Congress party has sharply criticised the Modi government following the Reserve Bank of India's decision to allow banks to hike ATM withdrawal charges, labelling them as "collection agents" exploiting citizens. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge highlighted that the government has extracted approximately Rs 43,500 crore from individuals through non-maintenance fees on savings accounts, emphasising the burden of additional charges such as inactivity fees, annual bank statement fees, and processing fees for loans.

"The painful price rise and unbridled loot constitute the BJP's extortion mantra,"

Mallikarjun Kharge *PHOTO: PTI*

Kharge stated in a post on social media platform X. He also lamented the government's cessation of reporting the revenue generated from these charges in Parliament.

In a separate development, Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, alleged that the BJP government's cronyism has led to a crisis in the banking sector, adversely affecting junior employees who endure toxic work environments. Gandhi pointed to loan waivers amounting to Rs 16 lakh crore written off for affluent individuals, criticising the impact of mismanagement on honest workers. He urged professionals facing injustice to share their experiences via his platform. *—PTI*

- Kharge lashed out at the BJP for allowing banks to hike ATM withdrawal charges, calling it an extortion matra

Owaisi labels Waqf Bill a 'looters law'

HYDERABAD, 29 MARCH

AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi strongly criticised the Centre's Waqf (Amendment) Bill, labelling it the 'looters (Amendment) law', claiming that the BJP-led government aims to seize waqf properties. Addressing reporters, Owaisi alleged that the bill undermines constitutional rights, breaching Articles 14, 26, and 29. He voiced his disdain over "false" remarks made by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who suggested that individuals cannot challenge Waqf tribunal decisions in court. Owaisi reiterated that the proposed bill represents a "direct assault on Muslims". *—PTI*

AFTER 17 YEARS

HC judge acquitted in cash-at-door case

CHANDIGARH, 29 MAR

Seventeen years after a cash-at-judge's door case rocked the judiciary, a special CBI court here on Saturday acquitted former Punjab and Haryana High Court Judge Justice (Retd) Nirmal Yadav and four others in the matter.

In the sensational case, a packet containing Rs 15 lakh was allegedly wrongly delivered at the residence of Justice Nirmaljit Kaur, another sitting high court judge, on 13 August, 2008. It was alleged that the cash was meant for Justice Yadav as a bribe to influence a property deal.

The Court of Special CBI judge Alka Malik pronounced the verdict on Saturday.

The names of Sanjiv Bansal, former Additional Advocate General, Haryana, Delhi-based hotelier Ravinder Singh, city-based businessman Rajiv Gupta and another person had also surfaced in the case. Bansal, one of the accused, died of an illness in February, 2017.

During the course of Justice Nirmal Yadav' trial, as many as 69 of 84 witnesses were examined by the prosecution *PHOTO: PTI*

After her name cropped up in the cash-at-judge's door case, Justice Yadav was transferred to the Uttarakhand High Court. In December 2009, the CBI filed a closure report in the case, which was rejected by the CBI court in March 2010 and ordered reinvestigation.

After the CBI sought sanction to prosecute Justice Yadav, the then Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court granted the same in November 2010.

The office of President of India approved the prosecution sanction in March 2011.

The CBI on 4 March, 2011 charge-sheeted Justice Yadav, who was then a judge in the Uttarakhand High Court, on the day of her retirement.

The CBI had held that Justice Yadav had committed an offence punishable under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. During the course of trial, as many as 69 of 84 witnesses were examined by the prosecution. In the 17-year trial period, several judges heard the case. *—PTI*

- A packet containing Rs 15 lakh was allegedly wrongly delivered at the residence of Justice Nirmaljit Kaur, another sitting high court judge, on 13 August, 2008.
It was alleged that the cash was meant for Justice Yadav as a bribe to influence a property deal

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah pays tribute to a fallen J&K police personnel, in Jammu *PHOTO: PTI*

Four slain cops in Kathua given tearful adieu

JAMMU, 29 MARCH

The last rites of four police personnel, killed in an encounter with terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, were performed with full honours at their native places.

Head constable Jagbir Singh of Mattu-Khour in Jammu's Akhnoor and selection grade constables -- Tariq Ahmad of Chamba-Panthal in Reasi, Balwinder Singh Chib of Kana Chak, and Jaswant Singh of Londi Morh in Kathua were killed in the two-day gunfight in on Thursday.

Two Pakistani terrorists were also killed in the operation. While the bodies of three policemen were retrieved from the encounter site on Friday evening, Jagbir Singh's body was recovered early Saturday.

Amidst surcharged atmosphere and emotional scenes, thousands of people attended the last rites, raising slogans in praise of the slain policemen. *—PTI*

Saif's attacker seeks bail, claims to be innocent

MUMBAI, 29 MARCH

The 30-year-old Bangladeshi national arrested for allegedly stabbing Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan at his house in Bandra has applied for bail, claiming that a false case has been registered against him. In a plea before court's session on Friday, accused, Mohammad Shariful Islam Shehzad, claimed "first information report is patently false and a false case has been registered against him". He, claimed his arrest was illegal, as the investigating agency had "clearly and blatantly disregarded" section 47 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita. The plea will be heard on 1 April. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Pro-Palestine rally organisers booked in J&K

SRINAGAR, 29 MARCH

A case was registered on Friday against the organisers and participants of a procession in Jammu and Kashmir's Budgam district for allegedly creating a law-and-order situation by raising "objectionable slogans". The case has been lodged against the organisers and participants of a Youm-e-Quds procession in Sonpah village, Beerwah, in the central Kashmir district, a police spokesperson said. Youm-e-Quds, officially known as International Quds Day, is an annual pro-Palestine event held on the last Friday of the Islamic holy month of Ramzan to express support for Palestinians. Police said during the procession, a large crowd gathered under the directions of the organisers and raised objectionable slogans. The organisers allegedly tried to create a law-and-order situation and blocked Sonpah-Beerwah road, thereby causing obstructions to public, he added. *—PTI*

Air Force officer shot dead at home in Prayagraj

PRAYAGRAJ, 29 MARCH

An Indian Air Force civil engineer was shot dead Saturday morning at his official residence in the cantonment area here in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, police said. An unknown person shot at the engineer from the window while he was sleeping in his room in Engineers Colony inside the Air Force Station, Puramufti Station House Officer (SHO) Manoj Singh said. Air Force civil engineer SN Mishra, 51, received a bullet in his chest and he was rushed to the Army hospital. Mishra succumbed to his injuries at the the hospital, the SHO said. CCTV footage installed in the Air Force Station shows a person jumping over the boundary and coming inside, he said, adding that efforts are on to nab him. *—PTI*

Heat wave alerts in Andhra, Kolkata

AMARAVATI/KOLKATA 29 MARCH

The Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) forecast severe heat waves in 35 mandals and heat waves in 223 mandals across the state on Saturday. According to APSDMA Managing Director R Kurmanadh, 181 locations recorded temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius on Friday across the state. Heat wave conditions are likely to prevail in some southern districts till Sunday, with day temperatures remaining three to five degrees Celsius above normal in Gangetic West Bengal, the IMD said on Saturday. The maximum day temperature is likely to fall by two to three notches from Monday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. Kolkata recorded a maximum temperature of 37.6 degrees Celsius on Friday, nearly three notches above normal, it said. *—PTI*

ISRO launches Semicryogenic engine

Engine to launch India's heaviest objects; 'technology only available to few countries' says ISRO

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

ISRO has announced significant progress in the design and development of a Semicryogenic engine or Liquid Oxygen / Kerosene engine with a high thrust of 2,000 kN (kilonewton) that will power the Semicryogenic booster stage of the Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3).

The first major breakthrough in the Semicryogenic engine development programme was achieved on 28 March, when the first successful hot test of Engine Power Head Test Article (PHTA), was carried out at ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri, Tamil Nadu, it said.

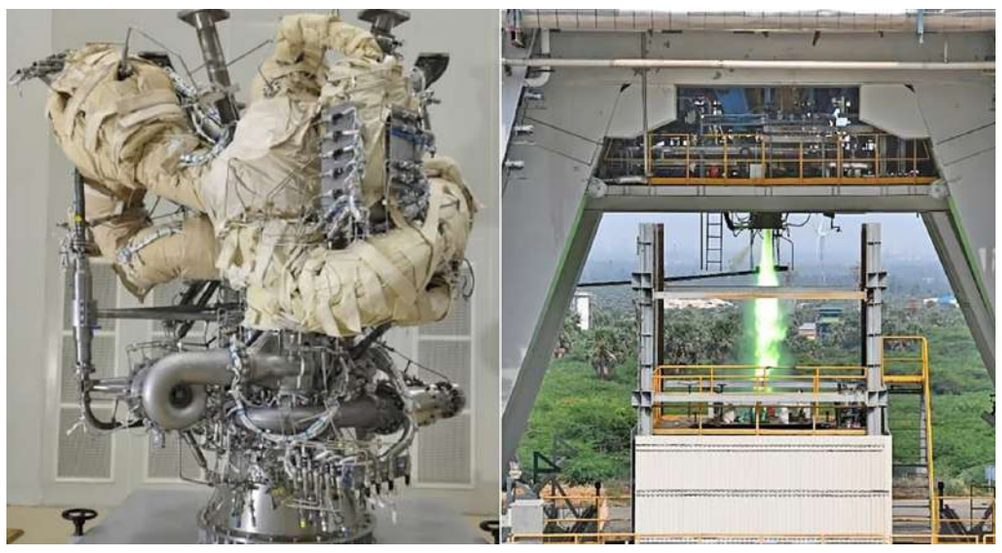
Highlighting that the Friday's test demonstrated the smooth ignition and boost strap mode operation of the engine for a test duration of 2.5 seconds, the space agency said the objective of the test was to validate the integrated performance of the critical subsystems by carrying out a hot-firing for a short-duration of 2.5 seconds.

Noting that the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre of ISRO is developing the Semi cryogenic propulsion Engine and Stage, ISRO said the stage (SC120) powered by the 2,000kN semi-cryogenic engine (SE2000) will replace the present core liquid stage of LVM3.

The Semicryogenic propulsion system along with an uprated cryogenic stage in the LVM3 vehicle enhances its payload capability from 4 tonne to 5 tonne in Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit , it added.

"The complex engine hardware uses special materials to withstand the high temperature and oxidiser rich combustion. The development of this engine in these high thrust levels is highly challenging and this technology is available with only very few nations," it said.

The hot test is the first of a series of tests. *—PTI*



The Semicryogenic propulsion system along with an uprated cryogenic stage LVM3 vehicle enhances its payload from 4 tonne to 5 tonne

PHOTO: ISRO

ISRO SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETES LIFE TEST OF STATIONARY PLASMA

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

PHOTO: ISRO

ISRO has announced the successful completion of a 1,000-hour life test on its 300mN (millinewton) Stationary Plasma Thruster that is developed for induction in the Electric Propulsion System of satellites.

The Electric Propulsion System is proposed to replace the chemical propulsion system in future satellites of the space agency and pave the way for communication satellites which use only electric propulsion systems for orbit raising and station keeping.

The induction of these thrusters will result in extensive mass savings thereby enabling the enhancement of transponder capacity in communication satellites, it said.

"This test is a major milestone to demonstrate the reliability and robustness of the thrusters before induction into the satellites. The Electric propulsion System is proposed to be inducted and validated in the upcoming Technology Demonstration Satellite (TDS-01) of ISRO and will be used for orbit raising to the Geostationary orbit," it said. *—PTI*

Rescuers work at a collapsed under construction high-rise building after a 7.7 magnitude earthquake rocked Bangkok, Thailand PHOTO: PTI

Indians recall Thai quake horrors

KOLKATA, 29 MARCH

After Myanmar and Thailand were jolted with a 7.2 magnitude deadly earthquake on Friday, Indian tourists, who form a significant chunk of visitors in Thailand, rushed home as soon as the effects of the quake were felt.

On Friday night, passengers started arriving back in India at the Kolkata airport from Bangkok. A passenger, Ranjan Banerjee, said that the current situation was normal in Bangkok, but when the quake was felt, it was like an emergency situation.

"When it happened, there was an emergency situation," Banerjee said to ANI.

Sanjiv Dutta was jolted awake when his bed began to shake.

"My bed started shaking when the earthquake took place. I saw that the building was shaking. Later, I saw people running in panic. There was a lot of traffic. It took 5-6 hours to cover 30 kms."

Another passenger, Safdar, said that he saw skyscrapers quiver.

"I was on the road at that time. I saw some skyscrapers shaking. There was water coming out of an infinity pool. People were scared that the building might collapse, but nothing like that happened. Public transport were shut for hours", Safdar said. *—ANI*

Elderly man killed for black magic ritual in Bihar

AURANGABAD, 29 MARCH

A 65-year-old man, Yugual Yadav, was reportedly murdered and his torso burnt in a 'Holika Dahan' fire as part of black magic practices in Aurangabad district, Bihar. Police have arrested four individuals, including a relative of a 'tantric,' while the tantric remains at large.

Yadav was reported missing on 13 March. During investigations, human bones were discovered in the ashes of a Holika Dahan fire.

According to police, the tantric, conducted the ritual for a man who was seeking a child. The group allegedly had previously sacrificed a teenager, whose remains were disposed of in a well. *—PTI*

Dallewal did not break fast, still protesting, says farmer leader

CHANDIGARH, 29 MARCH

Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal remains on an indefinite hunger strike, contrary to claims made by the Punjab government in the Supreme Court that he had broken his fast by taking water. On Saturday, farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar asserted that Dallewal had only consumed a glass of water after the release of detained farmers, clarifying that his protest continues until all demands are met.

Dallewal began his hunger strike on 26 November 2022, advocating for a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for crops.

Jagjit Singh Dallewal PHOTO: PTI

Following discussions with the Centre in January, he had accepted medical assistance at the Khanauri protest site but did not terminate his fast.

On 19 March, a police operation led to the detention of several farmer leaders returning from a meeting with Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. Many were released on Friday, shortly before meeting Dallewal in hospital.

Kohar reaffirmed that Dallewal had pledged to abstain from water until all detained farmers were freed—a promise he fulfilled only after their release. Meanwhile, numerous farmers have expressed concerns over missing belongings from the protest sites, alleging potential theft during police enforcement actions. *—PTI*

University inaction led to Nepali KIIT student's death: NHRC

BHUBANESWAR, 29 MARCH

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has revealed that the suicide of a Nepali student at the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) was linked to the university's inaction. NHRC member Priyank Kanoongo stated that the student had reported incidents of sexual abuse and blackmail to university authorities, who allegedly attempted to cover up the situation and failed to inform the police, ultimately leading to her death.

Kanoongo highlighted that following the tragedy, students of Nepali origin faced mistreatment, including being evacuated from their hostels at midnight. Her death sparked protest from Nepali students, who claimed the university neglected multiple complaints regarding harassment. Nepal's NHRC has formally requested the Indian NHRC to investigate the circumstances surrounding the student's death. *—ANI*

SC stays NGT fine of Rs 5,000 on Bihar govt over Ganga pollution

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The Supreme Court has placed a stay on the National Green Tribunal's order, which imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 on the Bihar government for failing to comply with directives aimed at preventing and controlling pollution in the river Ganga.

In an order issued on 15 October last year, the tribunal had also mandated the Chief Secretary of Bihar to attend a virtual hearing to update the tribunal on the progress regarding pollution control efforts for the Ganga.

The plea contesting this order was heard by a bench comprising Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih, who issued a notice to the Centre and other parties, requesting their responses within four weeks.

The bench stated, "Until further orders, there shall be a stay of the impugned order."

Bihar government fails to comply with directives aimed at preventing and controlling pollution in the river Ganga PHOTO: PTI

National Green Tribunal has been actively addressing the issues surrounding the pollution of the Ganga, focusing on contributions from all states and districts through which the river flows. The tribunal highlighted that Bihar had failed to provide water sample analysis reports, specifically analyses from points where tributaries enter and exit the Ganga. This failure to comply with earlier directives led to the initial penalties imposed on the state. *—PTI*

SC justice calls for urgent action on pollution

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Supreme Court Judge Justice Vikram Nath emphasized the urgent need for regulating emissions and investing in cleaner technologies at the inaugural session of the National Conference on Environment - 2025 held at Vigyan Bhawan. Attended by President Droupadi Murmu, Justice Nath highlighted the unacceptable reality of children needing masks to play outdoors due to high pollution levels in the capital.

He called for solutions that balance economic growth with environmental well-being, stating that government policies should prioritise green technologies.

Justice Nath also raised concerns about water pollution, noting the burden of untreated waste on sacred rivers. *—PTI*

70K IN 2025?

Israel expects surge of Indian tourists pilgrims

KOCHI, 29 MARCH

As gunfire echoed and smoke filled the air, a steadfast stream of pilgrims from Kerala made their way to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Israel.

For centuries, Christians worldwide have flocked to the Holy Sepulchre, which houses Christ's tomb, and for Keralites its appeal remains strong.

The data from the Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) reveals that 9,600 Indian tourists visited Israel in 2024, with 50 per cent of them travelling for pilgrimage--most from Kerala. The country is expecting an increase pilgrim tourist this year.

"We are expecting around 70,000 tourists travelling to Israel from India this year, and of this, 48 per cent are pilgrims," Amruta Bangera, Director of Marketing, IMOT-India told PTI.

India is among the top 10 countries in terms of tourist arrivals to Israel.

India is among the top 10 countries in terms of tourists to Israel. In 2024, more than 9.600 Indian tourists visited the country PHOTO: X

All the tourist attractions are completely safe, and the safety of tourists is the ministry's top priority, she added. "None of the tourists were harmed even in the difficult situations," Bangera said.

In 2018, Israel welcomed 70,800 Indian tourists but the numbers declined due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the responses now indicate the numbers would come up like in 2018, said Bangera.

In terms of the visitor mix, pilgrimage remains the dominant segment, followed by leisure travellers, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions), FIT (Foreign Independent Travel), and visiting friends and relatives, Bangera added . *—PTI*

3 booked for ragging in T'gana medical college

HYDERABAD, 29 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Three students from a government medical college in Nagarkurnool district are facing allegations of ragging after a junior student reported an incident of severe mistreatment, police confirmed on Saturday.

The allegation arose from an incident on 25 March, when a first-year MBBS student was reportedly "humiliated" in the hostel by a third-year student and two second-year students. According to the college principal, one senior physically assaulted the junior with a belt and slapped him, while demanding his UPI PIN, which he refused to divulge.

In his police complaint, the victim detailed being coerced into performing an "air chair" punishment—a prolonged squat—followed by holding a 5 kg LPG cylinder for 30 minutes.

Further humiliation followed, as the seniors accessed his phone, viewed private photographs and videos, and threatened to share them with the student's father.

The Anti-Ragging Committee is set to convene on 2 April to discuss the incident, and an FIR has been registered against the accused under relevant sections of the BNS and the Telangana Prohibition of Ragging Act, 1997. The police have also initiated counselling for the perpetrators. Disciplinary action from the college is expected to follow. *—PTI*

EID AL-FITR IS HERE!

As Eid approaches, people are preparing for the celebration. People shop ahead of the festival, in Srinagar
PHOTO: PTI

Here's what Eid al-Fitr is & how Muslims celebrate it

Eid literally means a "festival" or "feast" in Arabic. There are two major eids in the Islamic calendar per year – Eid al-Fitr earlier in the year and Eid al-Adha later.

Eid al-Fitr is a three-day-long festival and is known as the "Lesser" or "Smaller Eid" when compared to Eid al-Adha, which is four-days-long and is known as the "Greater Eid."

The two Eids recognize, celebrate and recall two distinct events that are significant to the story of Islam.

Eid al-Fitr means "the feast of breaking the fast." The fast, in this instance, is Ramadan, which recalls the revealing of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad and requires Muslims to fast from sunrise to sundown for a month.

Eid al-Fitr features two to three days of celebrations that include special morning prayers. People greet each other with "Eid Mubarak," meaning "Blessed Eid" and with formal embraces.

Sweet dishes are prepared at home and gifts are given to children and to those in need. In addition, Muslims are encouraged to forgive and seek forgiveness. Practices vary from country to country.

In many countries with large Muslim populations, Eid al-Fitr is a national holiday. Schools, offices and businesses are closed so family, friends and neighbors can enjoy the celebrations together.

In the US and the UK, Muslims may request to have the day off from school or work to travel or celebrate with family and friends.

In countries like Egypt and Pakistan, Muslims decorate their homes with lanterns, twinkling lights or flowers. Special food is prepared and friends and family are invited over to celebrate.

In places like Jordan, with its Muslim majority population, the days before Eid al-Fitr can see a rush at local malls and special "Ramadan markets" as people prepare to exchange gifts on Eid al-Fitr.

In Turkey and in places that were once part of the Ottoman-Turkish empire such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Azerbaijan and the Caucasus, it is also known as the, "Lesser Bayram" or "festival" in Turkish.

People purchase vermicelli from a shop ahead of Eid ul-Fitr festival, during the holy month of Ramzan, at Fancy Bazaar, in Guwahati, Saturday
PHOTO: PTI

The other festival, Eid al-Adha, is the "feast of the sacrifice." It comes at the end of the Hajj, an annual pilgrimage by millions of Muslims to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia that is obligatory once in a lifetime, but only for those with means.

Eid al-Adha recalls the story of how God commanded Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ismail as a test of faith.

The story, as narrated in the Quran, describes Satan's attempt to tempt Ibrahim so he would disobey God's command. Ibrahim, however, remains unmoved and informs Ismail, who is willing to be sacrificed.

But, just as Ibrahim attempts to kill his son, God intervenes and a ram is sacrificed in place of Ismail.

- Eid al-Fitr is a three-day-long festival and is known as the "Lesser" or "Smaller Eid" when compared to Eid al-Adha, which is four-days-long and is known as the "Greater Eid.

During Eid al-Adha, Muslims slaughter an animal to remember Ibrahim's sacrifice and remind themselves of the need to submit to the will of God.

Eid al-Fitr is celebrated on the first day of the 10th month in the Islamic calendar.

Eid al-Adha is celebrated on the 10th day of the final month in the Islamic calendar.

The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, and dates are calculated based on lunar phases. Since the Islamic calendar year is shorter than the solar Gregorian calendar year by 10 to 12 days, the dates for Ramadan and Eid on the Gregorian calendar can vary year by year.

Eid al-Fitr, as it follows the fasting of Ramadan, is also seen as a spiritual celebration of Allah's provision of strength and endurance.

Amid the reflection and rejoicing, Eid al-Fitr is a time for charity, known as Zakat al-Fitr. Eid is meant to be a time of joy and blessing for the entire Muslim community and a time for distributing one's wealth.

Charity to the poor is a highly emphasized value in Islam. The Quran says,

"Believe in Allah and his messenger, and give charity out of the substance that Allah has made you heirs of. For those of you who believe and give charity for them is a great reward." —*The Conversation*

SALAR

Why Eid is not celebrated on the same day

Eid is a special time for Muslims. There are two major Eid celebrations each year: Eid al-Fitr is celebrated at the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting, and Eid al-Adha is connected to the dates of Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

Eid, which means "festival" or "feast" in Arabic, is a celebratory occasion for more than one billion Muslims worldwide. However, in some countries, especially multicultural ones like Australia, Muslims don't always celebrate Eid on the same day.

Here's why

Beyond different groups celebrating on different days, the timing of Eid celebrations also shift as a whole each year. That's because Islam follows the lunar calendar, based on the moon's cycles – unlike the Gregorian calendar, which follows the sun. As such, dates on the Islamic calendar come 10–12 days earlier each year. This means the dates of both Eids also move about 11 days forward each year.

In terms of the Islamic calendar: Eid al-Fitr happens on the 1st of the month of Shawwal, the 10th month, which comes right after the month of Ramadan. Eid al-Adha happens on the 10th of Dhul-Hijjah, the 12th month, during Hajj. Since Islam follows the lunar calendar, determining the start of each Islamic month, and the dates of both Eids, requires sighting the new crescent moon, which comes directly after the new moon.

But there are different methods for doing this, and different scholarly interpretations regarding what method is best. These variations are the reason one group in a community might celebrate on a Sunday, while others may celebrate on a Monday. Some Muslims believe each country should rely on its own local moon sighting. This means if the new crescent moon is visible in neighbouring countries, but not in Australia such as if it's hidden behind clouds, then Australia should celebrate a day after its neighbours. The organisation Moonsighting Australia follows this method, only declaring Eid when the moon is seen locally.

However, others argue if the moon has been sighted anywhere in the world, it should be accepted by all Muslims as the start of the new Islamic month. Some Muslims in Australia opt for this "global moon sighting" approach, following Saudi Arabia's Eid announcement even when the moon is not sighted locally. Apart from the question of where the crescent moon is sighted, there are also different views over how it should be sighted.

Many scholars believe in physically sighting it with the eyes, as was practised during the time of Prophet Muhammad. But some Muslim countries, such as in Turkey and parts of Europe, use astronomical calculations to predict the new moon's birth. This allows them to pre-set the date of Eid months, or even years, in advance.

In Muslim-majority countries, deciding the day of Eid happens at a government level. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the Supreme Court officially declares the date based on moon sighting reports. This decision sets the timing for Eid prayers and public holidays for the entire nation, allowing for unified celebrations across the country. But Muslims in Australia come from diverse cultural backgrounds, and hold varying views regarding how the moon should be sighted. Some may follow the Eid announcement from their country of origin. Others may rely on local announcements, or on dates set by peak bodies such as the Australian National Imams Council.

One 2023 report published by the ISRA Academy surveyed more than 5,500 Muslims in Australia to understand how they determined the date of Eid. The findings reveal notable differences across communities. Respondents from the Arab community were almost evenly split between following their local mosque (28.5 per cent) and the Australian National Imams Council (28.0 per cent), with a slightly lower percentage (23.9 per cent) following Moonsighting Australia. Only 0.6 per cent followed their country of origin.

Among the Turkish community, 16.1 per cent followed their country of origin, while the largest proportion relied on a local mosque or Islamic organisation. But given Turkish mosques tend to follow Turkey's state religious institution, Diyanet, most Australian Turks ultimately align with Turkey's decision on Eid. 18.8 per cent followed Moonsighting Australia and 14.6 per cent followed the national imams' council.

In the African Muslim community, 48.4 per cent followed Moonsighting Australia, while 32.8 per cent relied on a local mosque, and 11.7 per cent on the imams' council. —*The Conversation*

In some countries, especially multicultural ones like Australia, Muslims don't always celebrate Eid on the same day
PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

How the Islamic calendar works and why it's based on the lunar cycle

For Muslims, a month starts when a new moon is sighted. Here Middle East Eye explains why the Islamic calendar is different to the one most people are used to

More than 1.6 billion Muslims around the world follow the Islamic calendar in some form, meaning key dates, such as New Year's Day, are marked at different times to the rest of the world, the majority of whom follow the Gregorian calendar.

For Muslims, the Islamic calendar, also called the Hijri calendar, holds religious significance and was the main calendar of day-to-day life until the process of westernisation across the Islamic world made the Gregorian calendar dominant.

However, Muslims continue to mark religious events using the Islamic calendar, as well as historic anniversaries relating to the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The hijri calendar is used to determine the start dates for events, such as the start of Ramadan, the celebrations of Eid, and the Hajj pilgrimage.

The Islamic calendar is also commonly referred to as the Hijri calendar, a word that comes from the Arabic word hijra, meaning migration. It refers to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from the city of Mecca, his birthplace, to Medina in 622 CE to escape persecution by his tribe, the Quraysh.

The city of Medina is significant for Muslims, as it was where the early Muslim community, known as the Ummah, was established. Since the migration, 1,443 lunar years have passed, meaning we are now in the year 1443, according to the Hijri calendar.

The Islamic calendar is governed by the movements of the moon, meaning that each month starts with a new lunar cycle, marked by the "birth" of a new crescent moon.

As it is based on the lunar calendar, the Islamic calendar only has 354-355 days, due to the fact that a lunar cycle typically lasts for 29 or 30 days rather than the 30 or 31 days per month used in the solar calendar, which the dominant Gregorian calendar is based on.

If a new crescent moon is spotted on the 29th day, this marks the end of the lunar cycle, hence a new month starts the next day. By religious custom, it is only necessary for one Muslim in the community to spot the moon.

Today, modern technology means that observing the moon is much easier and more scientifically accurate. It has therefore become a tradition among Muslims to try spotting it themselves and not rely on any one country to sight the moon.

More than 1.6 billion Muslims around the world follow the Islamic calendar
PHOTO: PTI

Muharram: The Islamic calendar started with the month of Muharram, Arabic for "forbidden". The month is called that because all forms of fighting are prohibited and worshippers have to refrain from doing anything that would violate the sanctity of the month. Some Muslims believe that the month signifies new beginnings, as it initially came after Muslims performed the Hajj pilgrimage, and would come back from the ritual having their sins forgiven.

Safar: The second month of the Islamic calendar means "void" in Arabic and was given the name because, before the formation of Islam, Arabs would leave their homes in search of food during this month. Many would also use this time to travel, leaving their homes empty.

Rabi al-awwal: Meaning "first Spring", the month's name symbolises a period when cattle would start grazing. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad was born during this month, making it particularly special.

Rabi al-thani: named "second Spring", this month symbolises the end of the spring.

Jumad al-awwal: Meaning "first month of the parched land".

Jumad al-thani: Meaning "second month of the parched land" this signifies the end to dry and arid weather.

Rajab: This month is seen as sacred, and marks the second month in which fighting is forbidden for the faithful. The word rajab means respect or honour, but can also mean "to remove".

Shaban: Arabic for "scattered", this month gets its name from the time when Arab tribes would split up across the land and travel around to obtain water.

Ramadan: One of the most well known months of the Islamic calendar is Ramadan, which is Arabic for "burning heat".

The month, in which practising Muslims will fast from dawn to sunset, is one of the most important times of the year for worshippers. During this month, Muslims will place emphasis on giving to charity, visiting the poor and sick, as well as engaging in extra prayers and asking for forgiveness.

Shawwal: Meaning "raised", the name refers to when female camels raise their tails when they are ready to give birth. The first of the month is Eid al-Fitr, a time of celebration after Ramadan.

Dhul Qida: Meaning "the possessor of the truce", the month is another in which fighting is prohibited.

Dhul Hijjah: The final year of the Islamic calendar means "the possessor of the pilgrimage". The Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, mandatory for every Muslim who is physically and financially able to undertake it in their lifetime.

The Hajj pilgrimage ends with Eid al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice, which falls on the 10th day and commemorates the willingness of the Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ismael in accordance with a command of God.

Today Muslims all over the world abide by the Islamic lunar calendar, however most will live their day-to-day lives using the more widely used Gregorian calendar.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries still officially use the Islamic calendar, however may use the Gregorian calendar for civil purposes. —*Middle East Eye*

Columbia University head resigns after ceding to Trump

NEW YORK, 29 MARCH

Katrina A Armstrong, the interim president of Columbia University, resigned on Friday, just one week after the university agreed to meet most of the policy changes the Trump had demanded in a dispute about how the institution had responded to campus protests and allegations of antisemitism. Armstrong said, "This is one of the world's great universities, in its most vital city, and I am proud to have worked with extraordinary faculty, students, and alumni. But my heart is with science, and my passion is with healing. That is where I can best serve this University and our community moving forward." She did not mention Trump. *—PTI*

US Judge halts deportations to third countries

WASHINGTON, 29 MARCH

A federal judge temporarily blocked the Trump administration Friday from deporting people who have exhausted legal appeals to countries other than their own without first being allowed to argue that it would jeopardise their safety. US District Judge Brian E Murphy ruled that people with final orders of removal must have "a meaningful opportunity" to argue that being sent to a third country presents a level of danger deemed worthy of protection. His order remains in effect until the case advances to the next stage of arguments. The decision is a setback for an administration that has sent people to countries including Panama, Costa Rica and El Salvador when it is difficult to deport them to their homelands. In some cases a judge may determine that a person's homeland is too dangerous but authorities can send them to a third country. *—PTI*

Nigeria mob kills 16, suspecting them of abduction

ABUJA, 29 MARCH

A mob in southern Nigeria killed 16 people, at least some them when tires were forced over their heads and shoulders and set on fire because they were believed to be kidnappers, officials said Friday. The victims from the country's north were killed in the Uromi area of Edo State after being stopped by local security personnel. During a search of their vehicle, officers discovered locally made weapons and that triggered the attack by the mob, Edo police spokesperson Moses Yamu said in a statement. Videos shared on social media showed the victims being brutalized before they were eventually set on fire with worn-out vehicle tires. Mob violence in Nigeria has surged over the past decade. While attacks in the south are often linked to accusations of theft and witchcraft, the north has seen a rise in mob attacks over alleged blasphemy, according to a 2024 Amnesty International report. On a visit to the scene, Edo state Governor Monday Okpebholo said the perpetrators would face the full wrath of the law. *—PTI*

Rescuers clear the rubble in Bangkok, Thailand, on Saturday, as they search for victims at the site of a high-rise building under construction that collapsed after Friday's earthquake; A van stuck under a damaged building; (Below) Myanmar military leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing inspects victims in Naypyitaw

PHOTOS: PTI, THE MYANMAR MILITARY TRUE NEWS INFORMATION TEAM

IT'S A DOUBLE WHAMMY FOR MYANMAR

Shredded by civil war, Myanmar is now flattened by a devastating earthquake

BANGKOK, 28 MARCH

Torn by internal strife, Myanmar sits on the Sagaing Fault, a major north-south fault that separates the India plate and the Sunda plate making it prone to earthquakes.

Brian Baptie, a seismologist with the British Geological Survey, said it appears a 200-kilometre section of the fault ruptured for just over a minute, with a slip of up to 5 metres in places, causing intense ground shaking in an area where most of the population lives in buildings constructed of timber and unreinforced brick masonry making the consequences even more disastrous.

Relief and rehabilitation efforts are complicated as Government forces have lost control of much of Myanmar, and many places are incredibly dangerous or simply impossible for aid groups to reach. More than three million people have been displaced by the infighting and nearly 20 million are in need, according to the United Nations.

Myanmar's government said blood was in high demand in the hardest-hit areas. In a country where prior governments sometimes have been slow to accept foreign aid, Min Aung Hlaing said Myanmar was ready to accept outside assistance.

Haider Yaqub, Myanmar country director for the NGO Plan International, from Yangon said although a full picture is yet to emerge, the

humanitarian needs will be significant."

China and Russia, the largest suppliers of weapons to Myanmar's military, were among the first to step in. China said it has sent more than 135 rescue personnel and experts along with supplies like medical kits and generators, and pledged some USD 13.8 million in emergency humanitarian aid. Russia's Emergencies Ministry said it had flown in 120 rescuers and supplies.

India also sent a search and rescue team and a medical team and Malaysia said it would send 50 people on Sunday. South Korea said it would provide USD 2 million worth of humanitarian aid through international organisations, and the UN allocated USD 5 million to start relief efforts.

President Donald Trump said Friday that the US was going to help with the response, but some experts were concerned about this effort given his administration's deep cuts in foreign assistance.

Loved ones hold on to hope

Earthquakes are not so frequent in Thailand compared to Myanmar which is located on the seismic zone but seismologists say the damage was felt in Bangkok as the rupture in the Saigong fault headed towards the densely populated high rise city. In the popular Chatuchak market, heavy equipment was brought in to move the tons of rubble, as friends and family members of the missing held on to hope that they would be found alive. Waenphet Panta said she hadn't heard from her daughter Kanlayanee since a phone call about an hour before the quake. A friend told her Kanlayanee had been working high on the building on Friday. *—PTI*

Vance scolds Denmark during Greenland visit

NUUK, 28 MARCH

US Vice President JD Vance said on Friday that Denmark has "underinvested" in Greenland's security and demanded that Denmark change its approach as President Donald Trump continues to talk of taking over the Danish territory. The pointed remarks came as Vance, joined by his wife, national security adviser Mike Waltz, Energy Secretary Chris Wright and Sen. Mike Lee of Utah visited US troops on Pituffik Space Base on the mineral rich, strategically critical island.

"Our message to Denmark is very simple: You have not done a good job by the people of Greenland. You have underinvested in the people of Greenland, and you have underinvested in the security architecture of this incredible, beautiful landmass filled with incredible people. That has to change," said Vance expressing hope that they would ultimately partner with the US as it could give them a lot more protection and economic freedom.

Vance also said other countries have threatened Greenland as well as the US, Canada ***PHOTO: PTI***

The visit comes at a time when relations between the two countries strained after US president Donald Trump talked of annexation of the country. The original visit by US Second Lady Usha Vance had to be scaled down after an uproar among Greenlanders and Danes who were irked that the original itinerary was planned without consulting them.

In Washington, Trump said the US "needs Greenland for international security."

"Greenland's very important for the peace of the world," Trump said. "And I think Denmark understands, and I think the European Union understands it. And if they don't, we're going to have to explain it to them."

Ahead of Vance's arrival, four of the five parties elected to Greenland's parliament earlier this month signed an agreement to form a new, broad-based coalition government. The parties banded together in the face of Trump's designs on the territory. "It is a time when we as a population are under pressure," the prime minister-designate, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, said before the accord was signed to applause and cheers in the capital, Nuuk. *—PTI*

A member of a pro-monarchist group approaches police officers in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Friday ***PHOTO: PTi***

Curfew lifted in Kathmandu post protests

KATHMANDU, 29 MARCH

Kathmandu limped back to normalcy on Saturday as authorities lifted curfew imposed in the eastern part of Kathmandu following violent clashes between the security personnel and the pro-monarchy protesters, forcing the government to call the Army to control the situation.

Parts of Kathmandu saw pro-monarchy protesters pelt stones, attack the office of a political party, set fire to vehicles and loot shops in the Tinkune area. Two, including a TV cameraman, were killed in clashes between the security personnel and protesters.

Police have arrested 105 agitators who were involved in burning houses and vandalism. The protesting monarchists were demanding the reinstatement of the monarchy and a Hindu kingdom. The demonstration turned violent after Durga Prasai, the convenor of the agitation, broke the security barricade, riding a bulletproof vehicle, and headed towards Baneshwor, where the Parliament building is.

Those arrested included the general secretary of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Dhawal Shumsher Rana and a central member of the party, Rabindra Mishra, among others. Prasai, the key person behind Friday's violent demonstration, is at large, Superintendent of Police of Kathmandu District Police Range Apil Bohara said.

Police said 53 police personnel, 22 Armed Police Force personnel and 35 protesters were injured. Nepal's political parties through a Parliament declaration abolished the 240-year-old monarchy in 2008 and turned the erstwhile Hindu kingdom into a secular, federal, democratic republic.

The former king appealed for support in a video message on 19 February. *—PTI*

Sheikh Hasina. ***PHOTO: PTI***

Case against Hasina for hatching plot to oust Yunus

DHAKA, 29 MARCH

Bangladesh police have filed a case against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 72 others on charges of hatching a conspiracy to overthrow the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus by waging a civil war, officials and media reports said on Saturday.

The CID filed the case after receiving information about an online meeting on 19 December, 2024, where participants formed a platform called the "Joy Bangla Brigade" and discussed plans to re-install Hasina back to power through a civil war.

"Voice recordings of the conversation between former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the host, co-host, and other participating leaders and activists - hosted by Dr Rabbi Alam - revealed that the attendees vowed not to allow the legitimate government to run the country peacefully," the state-run BSS reported citing the case.

Police said 577 people from home and abroad attended the meeting and showed support for Hasina's directives in the meeting convened by Awami League's US chapter vice president Alam, who was named as the second accused in the case filed under the penal code.

Hasina's 16-year-long Awami League regime was toppled last August in a student-led violent mass uprising. Since then, 77-year-old Hasina has been living in India after fleeing Bangladesh and faces over 100 cases, including that of mass murder and corruption.

Most of her party leaders and ministers in her government were arrested or fled abroad to evade trial on charges like crimes against humanity or mass murders. *—PTI*

31 MARCH IS D DAY

Pak to deport Afghans as deadline nears

ISLAMABAD, 29 MARCH

Officials in Pakistan said they have completed arrangements to detain and expel a certain category of Afghan citizens after the March 31 deadline for their voluntary return to Afghanistan. A high-level meeting on Friday reviewed the arrangements to repatriate the Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders after the March 31 deadline.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi chaired the meeting. The Pakistan government in January asked the ACC holders to leave Pakistan by the end of March or face deportation.

Pakistani authorities refused to reset the deadline for their return despite requests by the Afghan government and rights bodies. In Friday's meeting, officials informed that all arrangements have been completed to send ACC holders back to Afghanistan. The officials said that holding centres have been set up to detain Afghan citizens before their deportation, with food and healthcare facilities arranged at the facilities, the Dawn newspaper reported.

The Pakistan government in January asked the ACC holders to leave Pakistan by the end of March or face deportation ***PHOTO: X***

Naqvi said the federal government was coordinating with the provinces regarding the repatriation process. He said Islamabad would provide full support to the provinces for the repatriation.

The meeting decided that Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry would visit the provinces to resolve any issues during the repatriation process. Naqvi also directed the authorities to treat foreign nationals respectfully during the repatriation process.

A door-to-door awareness campaign about the repatriation was underway and the mapping of ACC holders had also been completed, the meeting was told. According to the UN's International Organisation for Migration, ACC gives temporary legal status to Afghans during their stay in Pakistan. However, the federal government makes the decision on the duration for which the ACC would remain valid. *—PTI*

NEW US STRIKES AGAINST HOUTHI REBELS KILL 1

DUBAI, 29 MARCH

Suspected US airstrikes pounded Yemen overnight into Saturday, reportedly killing at least one as American military acknowledged earlier bombing a major military site in the heart of Sanaa controlled by the Houthi rebels.

The full extent of the damage and possible casualties wasn't clear, though the attacks followed a night of airstrikes.

An Associated Press review found the new operation appears more extensive than under ex-president Joe Biden, as the US moves from targeting launch sites to firing at ranking personnel as well as dropping bombs in cities. AP analysis of satellite photos show American military also has moved long-range stealth B-2 bombers to Diego Garcia in Indian Ocean — a base far outside of rebels' range. *—PTI*

Rare video shows assault on Palestinian village

JERUSALEM, 29 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Over a dozen Israeli settlers attacked a Palestinian village in the southern Israeli-occupied West Bank on Friday, beating residents with sticks and rocks, in an incident captured with rare clarity by security cameras. The video obtained by AP and testimonies from Palestinian witnesses appeared to conflict with the account of the attack provided by Israeli police and military, who arrested over 20 Palestinians afterwards.

The violence in the village of Jinba follows a settler attack earlier this week in a nearby village in which Hamdan Ballal, a Palestinian co-director of the Oscar-winning documentary "No Other Land," was left bloodied and bruised before being detained by Israeli soldiers for about 20 hours.

The videos provide uncommonly stark images of the type of settler assault Palestinians in the West Bank say now occurs frequently. They say radical Jewish settlers rarely, if ever, face repercussions for attacking Palestinian communities, while Palestinians are often rounded up in droves and detained by Israeli forces. Following the incident, Israeli police said they detained 22 Palestinians from the village on suspicion of stone throwing and brought them in for further investigation. The Police and the military gave different accounts of the event and did not respond when asked by AP why no Israeli civilians were targeted. *—PTI*

Solar PV module producing capacity to reach 125 GW

India's solar PV module manufacturing capacity will increase to 125 gigawatt (GW) by 2030 from the current 80 GW, and its installed solar cell manufacturing capacity will soon touch 40 GW from 25 GW at present, Union Minister of New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi said in Gujarat's Navsari district on Saturday. In 2014, solar PV module manufacturing was nearly absent in the country, he said after inaugurating a state-of-the-art 5.4 GW solar cell manufacturing facility of Waaree Energies Limited at Degam here. India has emerged as the world's third largest producer of renewable energy. *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

Force Motors bags 2,978 vehicle order from defence forces

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Force Motors on Saturday said it has received an order for 2,978 vehicles from the Indian defence forces. The vehicles are tailored to meet the diverse operational requirements of both the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force, showcasing the company's capability to deliver mission-ready vehicles designed to perform in demanding defence environments, the Pune-based automaker said in a statement.

Force Motors has been catering to the defence sector for many years through its Gurkha LSV (Light Strike Vehicle), a vehicle renowned for its durability, off-road prowess, and adaptability. "Our vehicles are designed with focus on quality, reliability, ruggedness, and performance, aligning perfectly with the operational needs of our defence personnel," Force Motors MD said. *—PTI*

Park Medi World files for Rs 1,260 crore IPO

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Park Medi World, operating hospitals under the Park brand, has submitted initial papers to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to raise Rs 1,260 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). According to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Friday, the IPO consists of a fresh issue of shares worth Rs 900 crore, alongside an offer for sale (OFS) of Rs 300 crore by promoter Ajit Gupta. Additionally, the company is considering a Pre-IPO Placement of up to Rs 192 crore, which would reduce the fresh issue size if completed. As of 30 September, 2024, Park Medi World is the second largest private hospital chain in North India, operating 3,000 beds across 13 multi-super specialty hospitals. *—PTI*

India's infra boosts data centre business: Report

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

India is poised to emerge as a preferred data centre hub, driven by several enabling factors, according to a recent report by JM Financial. The country's strategic location between the Middle East and Southeast Asia, coupled with improved cross-border connectivity through subsea cable landings and lower capital and operating costs, presents a compelling case for growth in this sector. The demand for data centres in India is on the rise, supported by a vast internet user base and government initiatives promoting data localisation. Despite generating 20 per cent of global data, India currently holds just 5.5 per cent of the world's data centre capacity, creating a significant demand-supply imbalance. As of 2024, India's co-location data centre capacity stands at 1.35 GW, with expectations of reaching 5 GW by 2030 to match half of China's data centre density. A data centre serves as a facility for housing critical applications and data, with design elements including routers, switches, firewalls, storage, and servers. *—ANI*

Musk sells X to his xAI for $33B in all-stock deal

He bought the site then called Twitter for $44 billion in 2022

WASHINGTON, 29 MARCH

Musk said in a post on X that the move will "unlock immense potential by blending xAI's advanced AI capability and expertise with X's massive reach." PHOTO: PTI

Elon Musk has sold social media site X to his own xAI artificial intelligence company in a USD 33 billion all-stock deal, the billionaire announced on Friday.

Both companies are privately held, which means they are not required to disclose their finances to the public.

Musk said in a post on X that the move will "unlock immense potential by blending xAI's advanced AI capability and expertise with X's massive reach."

He said the deal values xAI at USD 80 billion and X at USD 33 billion.

Musk, who serves as CEO of Tesla and SpaceX as well as an advisor to Presidend Donald Trump, bought the site then called Twitter for $44 billion in 2022, gutted its staff and changed its policies on hate speech, misinformation and user verification and renamed it X.

He launched xAI a year later.

"xAI and X's futures are intertwined. Today, we officially take the step to combine the data, models, compute, distribution and talent. This combination will unlock immense potential by blending xAI's advanced AI capability and expertise with X's massive reach," Musk wrote on X.

"The combined company will deliver smarter, more meaningful experiences to billions of people while staying true to our core mission of seeking truth and advancing knowledge." *—PTI*

S&P 500 DROPS 2%

Wall Street tumbles on worries about higher inflation

NEW YORK, 29 MARCH

Another wipeout is swamping Wall Street Friday on worries about a potentially toxic mix of worsening inflation and a US economy slowing because of households afraid to spend due to the global trade war. The S&P 500 was down 2 per cent in afternoon trading and on track for one of its worst days of the last two years. It's also heading for its fifth losing week in the last six after wiping out the last of its big gain from the start of the week.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 719 points, or 1.7 per cent, as of 2.25pm Eastern time, and the Nasdaq composite was 2.6 per cent lower.

Lululemon Athletica dropped 15.4 per cent to lead the market lower, even though the seller of athletic apparel reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It warned that its revenue growth may slow this upcoming year, in part because "consumers are spending less due to increased concerns about inflation and the economy," said CEO Calvin McDonald.

They're discouraging data points when one of the main worries hitting Wall Street is that President Donald Trump's escalating tariffs may cause US households and businesses to freeze their spending. Even if the tariffs end up being less painful than feared, all the uncertainty may filter into changed behaviors that hurt the economy.

A report on Friday morning showed all types of US consumers are getting more pessimistic about their future finances. Two out of three expect unemployment to worsen in the year ahead, according to a survey by the University of Michigan. That's the highest reading since 2009, and it raises worries about a job market that's been the linchpin keeping the US economy solid. *—PTI*

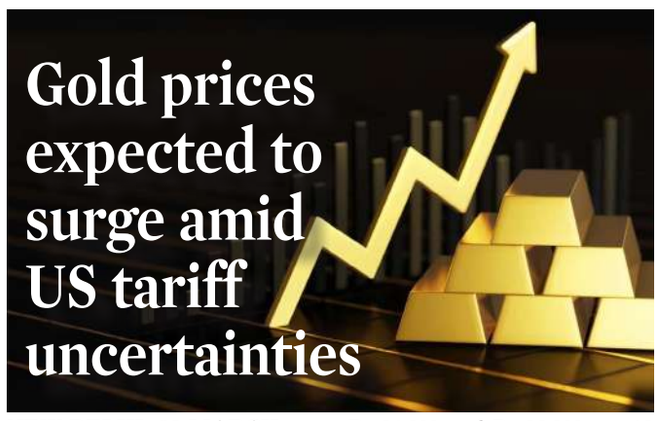


PHOTO:FREEPIK

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

According to a recent report by ICICI Bank Global Markets, uncertainties surrounding US tariffs are projected to drive gold prices in India to between Rs 87,000 and Rs 90,000 per 10 grams during the first half of 2025. Currently, gold prices stand at approximately Rs 83,410 per 10 grams for 22-carat gold and Rs 90,990 for 24-carat.

The report highlights that impending tariff measures from the Trump administration, slated to begin on 2 April, will likely bolster investment demand for gold. Over the past month, local gold prices have risen by 4 per cent, mirroring trends in global markets, coupled with a 2 per cent appreciation of the rupee against the US dollar.

Looking ahead, local gold prices are expected to maintain an upward trajectory, potentially reaching between Rs 94,000 and Rs 96,000 per 10 grams in the latter half of 2025. The report also forecasts global gold prices to occupy the range of USD 3,200 to USD 3,400 per ounce by December 2025.

Moreover, anticipated cuts in US Federal Reserve interest rates during 2025 and 2026 could further enhance the appeal of gold as lower yields stimulate demand. The report notes a trend among central banks to diversify reserves by increasing their gold holdings, which may contribute to long-term price stability.

Despite elevated gold prices impacting jewellery demand, resulting in a 14 per cent month-on-month and a 63 per cent year-on-year drop in gold imports, local exchange-traded funds (ETFs) have seen robust inflows, with Rs 19.8 billion recorded in February 2025. *—ANI*

US tariffs put emerging markets at risk

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Fitch Ratings has issued a report highlighting potential risks for the US's trading partners, particularly emerging market economies, due to the Trump administration's forthcoming tariff reciprocity plans. These plans, set to take effect on 2 April, are anticipated to result in increased tariff rates.

The global rating agency noted that many emerging markets, including India, Brazil, Thailand, Malaysia, South Africa, Turkey, Vietnam, and Indonesia, currently impose significantly higher tariffs on US exports compared to those levied by the US on imports from these countries. Fitch warns this discrepancy could lead to these nations facing higher tariffs under President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs strategy.

Analysing the situation, Fitch compared tariff rates faced by US exporters in various markets with those paid by US importers for goods sourced from these countries. The anticipated implementation of reciprocal tariffs aligns with Trump's ongoing emphasis on matching tariffs imposed by other nations to foster fair trade.

Notably, while tensions over tariffs mount, the US and India are engaged in negotiations for a comprehensive bilateral trade agreement, focusing on the broader trade relationship rather than isolated products. India's Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal recently visited the US to advance discussions, following commitments from President Trump and Prime Minister Modi to negotiate a mutually beneficial trade agreement by autumn 2025. Senior representatives from both countries are set to facilitate these discussions moving forward. *—ANI*

India's forex reserves rise

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

India's foreign exchange reserves rose USD 4.529 billion to USD 658.800 billion in the week that ended on 21 March, extending gains for the third straight week, official data released by RBI showed.

In the week that ended on 7 March, the foreign exchange kitty witnessed the highest weekly gains in over three years.

Before that, forex reserves had slumped for about four months, recently hitting an 11-month low. Then followed the latest rollercoaster movement, with gains some weeks and declines the next.

Forex reserves started falling after touching an all-time high of USD 704.89 billion in September. They are now about 6.5 per cent lower from their peak.

The decline in reserves was most likely due to RBI intervention, aimed at preventing a sharp depreciation of the Rupee. The Indian Rupee is now at or near its all-time low against the US dollar.

Estimates suggest that India's foreign exchange reserves are sufficient to cover approximately 10-11 months of projected imports.

Foreign exchange reserves, or FX reserves, are assets held by a nation's central bank or monetary authority, primarily in reserve currencies such as the US Dollar, with smaller portions in Euro, Japanese Yen, Pound Sterling. *—ANI*

HP, Telangana ink MoUs for hydro power

SHIMLA, 29 MARCH

The Himachal Pradesh government on Saturday inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Telangana for establishing 400 MW Seli and 120 MW Miar Hydro Electric Power Projects in Lahaul-Spiti district.

Both the projects are expected to be set up with an estimated cost of Rs 6,200 crore on the bank of Chenab river and are set to generate direct and indirect employment to about 5,000 youth of the state.

Telangana government has paid Rs 26 crore as upfront premium and after the commissioning of both these projects, HP will receive 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 30 per cent free power for the first 12 years, next 18 years, and remaining 10 years, respectively, under the new Energy Policy of the state government. After 40 years, both the projects would be transferred to Himachal Pradesh. Telangana would contribute 1.5 per cent of cost of projects towards Local Area Development Fund and provide additional 1 per cent free power. *—ANI*

48% BFSI firms worry about data security when using AI: Survey

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

PHOTO:ANI

Nearly half (48 per cent) of banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) companies flagged data security as their top concern for AI implementation, a survey conducted by global data solutions provider Hitachi's subsidiary Hitachi Vantara found.

The survey, reflecting inputs from 231 global IT and business leaders, noted that 84 per cent of respondents admitted that losing data to an attack would be catastrophic.

BFSI leaders (73 per cent) were confident that AI will benefit hackers more than cybersecurity defenders, with leaders concerned that external bad actors will use AI-enabled attacks to threaten the business. Leaders are concerned that an AI mistake will create an inability to recover data, or that a data breach will occur as a result of an AI mistake.

"As AI rapidly transforms India's financial sector, the real challenge is ensuring it operates on accurate, secure, and well-governed data. Trust is the foundation of India's BFSI industry, and even a small AI-related error, whether it is an inaccurate prediction or a security breach, can weaken customer confidence and create regulatory challenges," said Hemant Tiwari, Managing Director and Vice President of India and SAARC Region, Hitachi Vantara.

Despite accuracy challenges, the survey found that AI adoption within BFSI is accelerating. However, it noted that many are deploying AI without adequate preparation. *—ANI*

S'pore's top banker Piyush leaves DBS

SINGAPORE, 29 MARCH

Singapore's top banker Piyush Gupta has stepped down as DBS Bank chief executive after 15 years of spearheading the lender's journey through various financial markets, including setting up of a wholly-owned subsidiary in India.

"Piyush Gupta has driven a total transformation of DBS over these 15 years. His achievements speak for themselves – the accolades that DBS has received over the years, including recognition by Euromoney in 2016 as the first bank to be named World's Best Digital Bank. In 2018, DBS was named the World's Best Bank and has received the award multiple times since then," said Temasek Holdings CEO Dilhan Pillay.

Tan Su Shan has succeeded Gupta. Tan, who is the first female CEO in DBS' history and was previously the bank's deputy CEO, is expected to continue DBS' focus on high return on equity businesses and global growth.

Temasek Holdings Limited, a 51-year-old Singaporean state-owned multinational investment group, is a major shareholder of DBS. Meerut-born Gupta is 65 and a naturalised Singapore citizen. *—PTI*

IN INDIA, BY 2027

'Digital to account for half of media revenue'

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

PHOTO:PIXABAY

The Indian media and entertainment landscape is witnessing significant growth, driven by rising internet accessibility and the aspirations of its populous. A recent report by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in conjunction with consultancy firm EY projects that by 2027, new media — which includes digital platforms and online gaming — will comprise 46 per cent of the sector's revenue. In contrast, traditional media such as television, print, film, and radio is expected to contribute only 41 per cent.

The report further indicates that advertising revenue will represent 52 per cent of the total sector earnings in 2027, an increase from 51 percent in 2024. Meanwhile, subscription revenues are projected to decline to 35 per cent from 39 per cent over the same period. The media and entertainment sector is anticipated to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7 percent, adding an impressive Rs 564 billion (approximately £6.3 billion) by 2027, with new media responsible for 68 per cent of this growth.

As consumer habits shift towards online video and social media for news consumption, news media outlets are urged to revisit their content and monetisation strategies. This includes creating content in multiple formats that cater to various audience segments, particularly younger demographics.

For the first time, digital media has surpassed television, contributing 32 per cent of industry revenues in 2024, with an expected CAGR of 11.2 per cent between 2024 and 2027. Meanwhile, television has recorded a decline of 0.6 per cent, reflecting the changing preferences of audiences.

Overall, in 2024, the Indian media and entertainment sector grew by 3.3 per cent, now valued at Rs 2.5 trillion (approximately £29.4 billion), and contributes 0.73 per cent to the nation's GDP. *—ANI*

Delhi NCR & B'luru lead office leasing: Colliers

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Delhi NCR and Bengaluru together drove nearly half of the office leasing activity during the first quarter (Q1) of 2025, with leasing across the top seven markets remained strong in Q1 at 15.9 million sqare feet, reflecting a 15 per cent year-on-year (YoY) increase, according to a report by real estate and investment firm Colliers.

While Delhi NCR saw its highest quarterly leasing in the last 10 quarters, Chennai too witnessed a remarkable 93 per cent YoY surge at 2.9 million square feet, driven by space take-up by technology firms, the report noted.

This sustained demand growth underscores the continued resilience of the country's top seven markets, namely Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi NCR, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Pune.

Overall new supply touched 9.9 million square feet during Q1 2025, almost at par with the same period last year.

Both Bengaluru and Delhi NCR together drove two-third of the new supply during Q1 2025. While majority of the markets saw a decline in new supply on an annual basis, Delhi NCR and Pune witnessed multifold growth in new completions, as compared to Q1 2024. In fact, almost 90 per cent of the new supply during Q1 2025 was concentrated in three cities - Bengaluru, Delhi NCR and Pune.

With demand outpacing new supply across most cities, average office rentals increased annually by 8 per cent during Q1 2025. *—ANI*

PHOTO: X

No hiding place when it comes to facing India: Root

LONDON, 29 MARCH

Charismatic England batter Joe Root has advocated consistency to counter India in the upcoming five-Test series, saying "there's no hiding place" when it comes to facing such an indomitable opponent. India will commence their 2025-27 World Test Championship cycle in England with the opening match scheduled at Headingley from 20 June. Root, who surpassed Alastair Cook as England's all-time highest Test run-getter last year, is gearing up for the challenge following an impressive showing in the Champions Trophy recently.—*PTI*

BFI needs an early solution for Indian boxers

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The Indian boxers are regaining momentum after months of inactivity, but if the Boxing Federation of India's (BFI) election deadlock continues, the uncertainty around the formation of a new body could adversely impact the progress of the country's pugilists. President Ajay Singh, seeking a third term, has announced a series of age-group tournaments and assured that national camps will also resume soon, along with a revamped coaching setup. But if a new president takes over post-elections, there is no guarantee that the new EC will keep the current system. Singh stated, "We will fulfil our responsibility; a new team is free to take their calls later." However, potential disruptions could harm the boxers' preparation and affect consistency.—*PTI*

NEU and Jamshedpur face each other in a battle of equals

SHILLONG, 29 MARCH

NorthEast United FC would look to continue their four-game unbeaten run against Jamshedpur FC when the two sides face each other in a play-off match to seal a place in the Indian Super League semifinals here on Sunday. The Highlanders finished fourth in the league standings with 38 points from 24 games, securing 10 victories and eight draws. The top two teams Mohun Bagan Super Giant and FC Goa this season at the end of the League stage automatically qualify for the semi-finals. Teams finishing between third and sixth will feature in a single-leg knockout to determine the other two semi-finalists. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Houston Open: Scottie ties record with 62 for the lead

HOUSTON, 29 MARCH

Scottie Scheffler opened with two straight birdies and was on his way Friday in the Houston Open, tying the Memorial Park record with an 8-under 62 for a one-shot lead when the second round was halted by darkness after a two-hour storm delay. It was the most complete round of the year for Scheffler, who missed the first month of the season recovering from a glass puncture in his right palm that required minor surgery. The only green he missed was on No. 2, his 11th of the round, and he holed that from just inside 30 feet for birdie. —*PTI*

KL Rahul set to return as DC face SRH at Vizag

Pressure will be on skipper Cummins to inspire a turnaround

VISAKHAPATNAM, 29 MARCH

Fresh from their morale-boosting win over LSG and bolstered by the return of India wicketkeeper-batter KL Rahul, Delhi Capitals will look to build on the momentum when they take on formidable Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL here on Sunday.

After a thunderous start to their campaign, SRH lost to Lucknow Super Giants by five wickets on Thursday as the defeat showed that their explosive batting line-up can be reined in.

Going out of their den, the pressure will be on skipper Pat Cummins to inspire a turnaround.

Delhi, on the other hand, will be strengthened by the return of Rahul, who missed the season opener against LSG due to the birth of his first child.

Delhi Capitals have often struggled to close out games in recent seasons, and the hard-fought win over LSG should inject the much-needed belief in the squad.

Delhi boasts of a formidable bowling attack, spearheaded by Mitchell Starc, whose face-off with fellow Australian Travis Head promises to be a key battle.

Starc, alongside Axar and Kuldeep Yadav, will be crucial in countering SRH's explosive opening pair of Abhishek Sharma and Head. Stubbs and Mohit Sharma can also provide crucial breakthroughs towards the end.

SRH announced their intent with 286/6 in their season opener, with Ishan Kishan smashing a 47-ball 106 after Head (67 off 31 balls) and Abhishek Sharma (24 off 11) provided a fiery start.

However, they faltered in their second outing, managing just 190/9 against LSG.

"A score of 210-220 would have been par on the wicket. Overall, we just didn't put enough runs on the board," Klaasen admitted. "Losing wickets at crucial moments disrupted our momentum. We need to ensure that doesn't happen frequently."

SRH's bowling attack, led by Mohammed Shami, Cummins, and Harshal Patel, remains potent but was found wanting against LSG.

Cummins, in particular, had an off day, averaging 15 runs per over. The Australian captain will be keen to bounce back and lead from the front. —*PTI*

KL Rahul

Delhi Capitals VS Hyderabad

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	24
SRH Won:	13
DC Won:	11

DC vs SRH Match starts at **3.30 pm IST**

Chennai Super Kings VS Rajasthan Royals

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	29
CSK Won:	16
RR Won:	13

CSK vs RR Match starts at **7.30 pm IST**

Confused CSK pitted against clueless RR

GUWAHATI, 29 MARCH

Completely shaken by the sound thrashing that Royal Challengers Bengaluru handed them, a confused Chennai Super Kings might feel more "at home" against an equally clueless Rajasthan Royals on a slow turner expected to be on offer in their next IPL game here on Sunday.

Losing by more than 50 runs at 'Fortress Chepauk' would have seemed like a wishful thinking for an opposition side till date but RCB's 'class of 2025' under an ever-improving skipper Rajat Patidar has exposed some chinks in the CSK armoury and the match against RR couldn't have come at a better time for Ruturaj Gaikwad's men. CSK coach Stephen Fleming looked livid about Chepauk conditions where normally the team's template is to play games where it either defend 165 to 170 if batting first or chase down 155 to 160 by restricting opposition. The kind of batting line-up that they have with MS Dhoni now becoming a designated 'tail-ender' at No. 9 due to Impact Substitution has worked well. But the moment it became a chase of 175 plus, the same line-up didn't have enough firepower, and one world-class bowler(Josh Hazlewood) —*PTI*

"The balance of the RCB squad is 10 times better than in previous season"

-AB de Villiers
Retired South African great

"Stoutly countered the criticism that his team's brand of cricket was getting outdated"

-Stephen Fleming, CSK head coach

MIAMI OPEN 2025

Djokovic enters final after downing Dimitrov, closes in on 100th title

BRISBANE, 29 MARCH

Novak Djokovic moved to within one win of his 100th career title on Friday, outclassing Grigor Dimitrov 6-2, 6-3 to cruise into the final of the Miami Open.

With Lionel Messi watching, Djokovic cruised into the Miami Open final by routing 14th-seeded Grigor Dimitrov 6-2, 6-3 on Friday at Hard Rock Stadium.

The fourth-seeded Djokovic will try for a seventh Miami Open title on Sunday against unseeded 19-year-old upstart Jakub Mensik, who won a thriller decided by a third-set tiebreaker over No. 3 seed Taylor Fritz in Friday's other semifinal, 7-6 (7-4), 4-6, 7-6 (7-4).

The 37-year-old Djokovic, who won six times at the tournament's previous venue at Key Biscayne, is also going for his 100th professional title.

He has been out of form this year, starting with an injury retirement at the Australian Open in January. Earlier this month, he lost his first match at Indian Wells to Botic van de Zandschulp.

In his on-court interview, Djokovic acknowledged the presence of Messi, who plays for Major League Soccer's Inter Miami, calling him "King Leo."

Djokovic said Messi visited the locker room with his wife and children and they "exchanged gifts." Djokovic has seen Messi play live before, but this was the first time the soccer great watched him.

"It's a thrill to have his whole family," Djokovic said. "It's a huge honor. He's such a great athlete, not just a football player. His impact on the world of sports in the last 20 years has been immense.

Novak Djokovic PHOTO: X

"To have him watch me live brings me great joy and excitement, and also a little pressure. It's different when he brings his family. I was touched by that."

The match was disrupted during the third game when a fan was removed by security. The chair umpire came down to the court and called for security as he walked toward the stands.

Dimitrov had jawed with the fan and came over to the sideline to point out the heckler to the umpire.

"It's just heckling, it's fine," Dimitrov said. "I'm a very calm guy overall. I don't pick any fights, but don't trigger me." —*PTI*

FIRST ONE-DAY INTERNATIONAL

NZ beat Pakistan by 73 runs

NAPIER, 29 MARCH

Mark Chapman scored 132 and Daryl Mitchell 76 in a 199-run partnership as New Zealand made 344-9 and went on to beat Pakistan by 73 runs Saturday in the first one-day international.

Chapman posted his third one-day international century and rebuilt the innings with Mitchell after New Zealand had been three wickets down in the 13th over, struggling against bounce and swing from the Pakistan fast bowlers.

Muhammad Abbas, the first Pakistan-born player to play for New Zealand, made 50 from 24 balls, the fastest half century by a player on debut in one-day internationals.

Babar Azam led Pakistan's run chase with 78 from 83 balls, but when he was out, Pakistan slumped, losing seven wickets for 22 runs.

Mark Chapman and Daryl Mitchell embrace PHOTO: X

New Zealand captain Michael Bracewell was forced to bring back his strike bowlers Will O'Rourke and Jacob Duffy.Duffy then ran out Tayyab Tahir (1) and bowled Irfan Khan first ball as Pakistan slumped to 253-6 in the 40th over. Pakistan's hopes faded as wickets dwindled and the run-rate rose.

Pakistan won the toss, bowled, and was on top early through the efforts of its four seam bowlers, Naseem Shah, Akif Javed, Mohammad Ali, and Haris Rauf. Akif and Ali were making their ODI debuts.

There were patches of grass on the pitch at McLean Park, and the ball moved more than is usual at the venue, where the average first-innings score in ODIs is 244.

New Zealand 344 for 9 (Chapman 132, Mitchell 76, Abbas 52, Irfan 3-51) beat Pakistan 271 (Babar 78, Agha 58, Smith 4-60) by 73 runs —*PTI*

5 Indian wrestlers eliminated from Asian C'ship

AMMAN, 29 MARCH

India's men's freestyle wrestlers endured a tough day in the field as all five in action on Saturday bowed out of the Asian Championships after tame defeats, here.

In the 65kg category, Sujeet Kalkal was off to a flying start, beating Palestinian Abdullah Assaf by technical superiority, but could not breach the defence of Japanese Kaisei Tanabe.

Sujeet had a chance to bounce back to medal contention via repechage route as Tanabe had made the title clash but the Indian did not take the mat due to an injury.

Vishal Kaliraman's fate was in the hands of his vanquisher, Tulga Tumur Ochir from Mongolia. Vishal lost his opening bout 0-8 to a 2022 Asian Games gold medallist. —*PTI*

South Australia state wins cricket final after 29 years

PHOTO: X

ADELAIDE, 29 MARCH

South Australia has chased down a record 269 runs in an Australian first-class cricket final to win its first Sheffield Shield title in 29 years. South Australia scored 270-6 in its second innings to beat Queensland by four wickets on Saturday. It was the fourth day of the scheduled five-day final. Jason Sangha led the South Australians with an unbeaten 126 while Australia wicketkeeper Alex Carey scored 105. The two combined for a 202-run partnership. Queensland was bowled out for 95 in its first innings, the lowest total of any team batting first in a Shield final, which involves Australian state sides, and South Australia posted 271 all out in reply. Queensland appeared down and out at 221-6 in its second innings, just 45 runs ahead, at lunch on the third day, Friday. But centuries from Jack Wildermuth (111) and Jack Clayton (100) led a comeback, and Queensland reached 445 in its second innings for its 269-run lead.

The highest previous run chase to win a Shield final was Victoria's 239-2 against New South Wales in 1990-91. —*PTI*

SANDHU CLIMBS TO TIED 15TH, CHACARRA LEADS BY ONE SHOT AFTER THIRD ROUND AT HERO INDIAN OPEN

GURUGRAM, 29 MARCH

Ajeetesh Sandhu reclaimed his position as the top Indian golfer, rising 10 places to a tie for 15th after the third round of the Hero Indian Open here on Saturday.

Sandhu, who was tied for 4th after the opening round, carded a two-over 74 in Round 3, which included three birdies and five bogeys, to take his total to four-over par. This lifted him from his overnight tied-25th spot.

Last edition's runner-up, Veer Ahlawat (74), who had two birdies, including one on the 18th, but also two bogeys and a double bogey, stood at five-over, tied for 18th.

At the top of the leaderboard, Spain's Eugenio Chacarra, 25, grinded his way to a one-over 73, taking a one-shot lead over Japan's defending champion Keita Nakajima (74) and South Africa's Brandon Stone (71). England's Matthew Jordan (73) and Sweden's Jens Dantorp (73) were a shot further behind at one under, heading into the final round. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Brazil fires coach Dorival Júnior after worst defeat

SAO PAULO, 29 MARCH

Brazil coach Dorival Júnior was fired on Friday after 14 months amid poor results and disappointing performances from the national team.

Júnior's sacking by Brazilian Football Confederation president Ednaldo Rodrigues came three days after a 4-1 defeat to bitter rival Argentina in Buenos Aires, Brazil's heaviest defeat in a World Cup qualifier.

"The confederation announces that Dorival Júnior's cycle is over," Rodrigues told the media in Rio de Janeiro. "From now on, we will work in the search for a substitute.

Much has been said about (the confederation) contacting A, B, or C coach, but I should say that (comment) was never coming from this president or anyone that the president authorized."

Brazil is fifth in South American qualifying for the 2026 World Cup. The top six qualify automatically.Under the 62-year-old Júnior, Brazil won seven matches, drew another seven, and lost two. But it has won only one of its last four games. The team scored 25 goals and conceded 11.

FA CUP

Eze fires Crystal to emphatic win over Fulham

LONDON, 29 MARCH

Eberechi Eze starred as Crystal Palace beat London rivals Fulham 3-0 at Craven Cottage to book their place in the FA Cup semi-finals.

It's been a dream week for Eze, who scored his first England goal against Latvia at Wembley on Monday - and will now be heading back to the national stadium with Palace after striking a stunner in off the far post and then crossing for unmarked Ismaila Sarr to nod in the visitors' second.

In the second half, Eddie Nketiah then stepped off the bench to stylishly wrap it up with a finish through Bernd Leno's legs. Jefferson Lerma had rattled the crossbar with a super volley before the breakthrough, but Fulham had been on top, with Rodrigo Muniz shooting wide inside two minutes and Andreas Pereira passing up a good chance after good work from Calvin Bassey. The hosts had also appealed for Adam Wharton to be sent off when the Palace midfielder, already on a yellow card, kicked out at Muniz on the halfway line. Referee Darren England blew for a free-kick, but despite a VAR check, there was no further punishment. Palace were well organised after the break, frustrating Fulham, who came closest to grabbing a lifeline when Willian's deflected strike had Dean Henderson at full stretch and Calvin Bassey miscued in a goalmouth scramble from the subsequent corner. But just as in the 2-0 Premier League win for Palace here last month, Fulham couldn't carve a way through, and Palace punished them on the counter when Nketiah narrowly stayed onside to slot in the third. —*PTI*

Eberechi Eze starred as Crystal Palace beat London rivals Fulham 3-0 PHOTO: X